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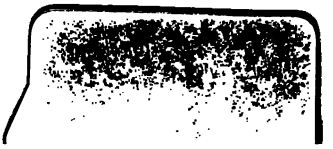

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MANNA IN THE HOUSE:

OR,

DAILY EXPOSITIONS OF THE GOSPEL

OF

St. Luke.

SPECIALLY ADAPTED FOR THE USE OF FAMILIES.

BY THE

REV. BARTON BOUCHIER, A.M.,

CURATE OF CHEAM, SURREY.

LONDON:

JOHN FARQUHAR SHAW,

27, SOUTHAMPTON ROW, RUSSELL SQUARE,
And 21, PATERNOSTER ROW.

EDINBURGH: J. MENZIES. DUBLIN: J. ROBERTSON.

M DCCC LIII.

101. a. 22.

LONDON:
WALTON AND MITCHELL, PRINTERS, WARDOUR STREET.

INTRODUCTION.

I do not know that I need to add anything by way of preface to this solitary volume, which, in continuance of my purpose of completing the Gospels, I now commend to the kindly consideration of my readers, in the hope that it may be as acceptable, as I am grateful to think its predecessors have been. They have been very properly called "unpretending volumes;" their only claim is to be faithful expositors of what the author believes to be "the truth as it is in Jesus,"—not exponents of the views of one party nor opponents of another; but simply to deliver that truth which is to be found by every one who prayerfully seeks it, within the covers of our good old English Bible. A writer of a preceding generation has left on record the well-known line,—

"An honest man's the noblest work of God."

But I believe it may be more truly said that a Bible Christian is the best and only expounder of the will of God; and it may be looked upon as

among the perilous signs of the last times, that in these days, when every man claims for himself the liberty to judge for himself, and demands for himself the right to explain his own purpose in his own words, he yet sets up another standard for the Almighty than he does for himself, and will not allow God's own Word to be the exponent of God's own will. He repudiates, in his own case and for his own guidance, man's interference, and yet unhesitatingly calls it in, and claims unyielding deference to it as a rule of faith where God is concerned. It is a bold word, which men in these days have invented to decry the Bible, Bibliolatry. I have read in that Word, that "Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me, and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He cometh in His glory." And, as I presume, a Bibliolater must mean, in their interpretation, one who reverences the Word of God and looks upon it as the charter of his birthright in Christ Jesus, the rule of his faith, and the guide of his life, there can be but little doubt that many a humble, simple-minded reader of the Word, who has never doubted its authenticity, never questioned its inspiration, never analyzed even the unhesitating conviction with which he receives it as God's Word, must be classed in that category of Bibliolaters, or persons who receive it, as it is indeed in truth, as the

Word of God with all thankfulness and joy. For my own part I would not dare to tamper with that childlike reverence which so obediently defers to the Word of truth; and which to every cavil, to every suggestion, can answer, "It is written:" and if I were asked, as it is sometimes asked: "Do you uphold the inspiration of every word of Scripture? May there not be, and are there not portions to which one would hesitate to affix that character, and which may more properly be considered as the production of the writer's own unaided impulse and discretion?" I would reply that I believe our Lord has intentionally and of full purpose left on record an answer to this very insinuation that not one letter, not even the smallest, an 'iota,' or a 'jod,' nay, not one tittle, not even the smallest accent or comma, or curvature over a letter should pass away from His law, till all were fulfilled. If then Jesus maintained not only a plenary, but a verbal, and even a *literal* and a *punctual* inspiration of His own word, what shall be said of the theologians of this age who would foist their own hypotheses into the place of the Word of God, and would dare to tread with 'covered' and unhallowed feet to obliterate the very imprints of the Godhead. It may be interesting on this subject to extract a passage from a letter of a prelate of our Church, whose name, in connection with the friend

to whom he wrote, may carry some weight with many, I mean Bishop Jebb and his friend Mr. Knox. Speaking of the Lord's Prayer, and reducing it according to the system pursued in his *Sacred Theology*, into parallelisms, he adds, "I have yet one more observation to make, which perhaps is too trifling to be hazarded, and yet there may be possibly something in it. In the arrangement I have offered above (that of the parallelisms) the parallel lines uniformly terminate with the same letter, a technical nicety which our Lord might have seen it wise to descend to, both for the aid of memory, and to secure the integrity of the prayer from subsequent mutilation and addition."

It would be quite out of place to encumber the present volume with any elaborate arguments to prove or uphold the plenary inspiration of the Word of God; but I have thought it not altogether irrelevant or out of season to add my own humble testimony, as a commentator on that Word, not merely to the fallacy, but to the danger of speculations, however ingenious, which would mutilate the integrity of the Bible, and which by their wedge-like process will gradually rend and destroy the whole. The Bible is God's most precious earthly boon to man, nor do I indeed fear that it will ever be lost to man "till all be ful-

filled," but this I do fear, that many a one may imperil its holy truths in his waverings, may lose its solace to his own heart in his doubts, and may be left without its guidance in the perplexities of life, and the darkening shadows of death; and therefore would I urge on every reader that close and clinging grasp with which the patriarch held the angel, when he said, "I will not let thee go except Thou bless me."

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. LUKE.

SECTION I.

(Chapter i. verse 1—7.)

It is a valuable testimony which St. Luke gives in this short preface to his Gospel to the authenticity of his own as well as the preceding Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark. It was indeed most natural that many of the early converts to Christianity, some, no doubt, who had themselves been followers of Jesus, and had known Him in the flesh, should desire to have a lasting record both of his words and actions. And thus many might be induced to commit to writing, both for their own edification and that of others, many an incident in the life and many a saying from the lips of Jesus, which might otherwise have escaped their memory. But they had not the sanction of apostolic authority to guarantee their authenticity, nor had they, as must have been well known at the time, that seal of the Spirit of God which at once decided their character of sacred or inspired writings. They were, it is true, on a holy theme,

and no doubt fulfilled the purposes for which they were written; and though they have all alike perished, their memorial has not perished with them, and like the Psalmist's prayer, they were not, as far as the writers were concerned, without a blessing, but returned to their own bosom in more confirmed reception of the truth; while God's own gracious purpose was more effectually fulfilled in extending and yet confining the narrative of the life of Jesus to the four authentic and inspired Gospels which have come down to us. And therefore it was that this evangelist, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, wrote this, the third Gospel,—a most rich and valuable addition to those which St. Matthew and St. Mark had previously composed. It is generally supposed that Luke was a Gentile convert, that is, that he was born of Gentile parents, but had embraced Judaism in his youth. It is uncertain at what period he became a convert to Christianity; he was undoubtedly the companion of Paul in many of his wanderings and voyages, of which he has left an account in that other narrative of the "Acts of the Apostles." He states of himself indeed that he had had perfect understanding of all things from the very first; and though the word may no doubt signify to "trace out and investigate by accurate enquiry," yet I confess I see no reason why we should not take it in its primary sense, and believe that Luke had personal knowledge, and may have

been one of those eye-witnesses to whom he here alludes. There are so many touches in his Gospel that seem to betoken something more than mere investigation and hearsay, and report from another, —there seem to be here and there so many traces of one who saw with his own eyes, and heard with his own ears, and *felt with his own heart;* that one almost inclines to a belief that St. Luke, if not one of the seventy, was at any rate an early believer in Jesus, though he may have been at the first, like Nicodemus and Joseph and many another, secretly so for fear of the Jews.

Be this, however, as it may, his Gospel has ever been admitted into the Sacred Canon, as an inspired writing; and we should thank God that each evangelist of the four seems so especially adapted to the purpose he had in view, and that Luke, writing as he did for Gentile converts and Pagan readers, should have been so peculiarly fitted for his work by the advantages of higher attainments and education. This Gospel begins with the earliest period,—the miraculous birth of the Baptist. The Old Testament closed its pages, and completed its wonderful series of predictions, by announcing the coming of this forerunner of Jesus: and the New Testament, in this Gospel of St. Luke, commences its sacred narrative by describing an angel, even the angel Gabriel, who standeth in the presence of God, as sent from God to announce the now approaching coming of Him whom the

prophet had declared should come in the power and spirit of Elijah. There is something very sweetly touching in this little domestic portraiture which the Evangelist here gives of the pious parents of the Baptist; and, in a family circle like our own, it is peculiarly grateful to find how many traces there are throughout the Bible of the Lord's notice and approval of such holy homes of piety and peace. It may not be the lot of all, or indeed of any of us, to have a home of grandeur, luxury, and wealth; but it is in the power of each to make his house a house of God, its walls salvation, and its gates praise. There may be trials even in such a house; there were in that of Zacharias and Elizabeth, but it was a house of peace because it was a house of prayer, and the testimony of God's Holy Spirit to both husband and wife is, that as they were righteous before God, and in His sight, so in the sight of men they were walking blameless in all fidelity, integrity, and uprightness of life. They are introduced to us at the close of a long and holy life; no records of their earlier life are preserved; but what a valuable and honourable testimony does their old age evidence, that as their grey hairs were found in the way of righteousness, their youth and maturer years also were alike spent in the fear and love of God. No record may be found on earth of our way of life; but if our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, we know the very words of that record of

all the Lord's children and servants, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

SECTION II.

(Chapter i. verse 8—25.)

It was said of Zacharias as well of his wife Elizabeth, that "they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." Alas! how soon has the fine gold become dim and tarnished! how has rebuke and punishment followed close on Zacharias' sin! I believe it to be quite true to all experience that it is a less trial to be submissive under the withholding or even the withdrawal of a blessing, than it is to have the desires of our hearts gratified, as it is easier to hold an empty than a full cup. The question which Zacharias here puts to the angel, "Whereby shall I know this?" was not the question of enquiry; it was the suggestion of "an evil heart of unbelief"—the insinuation of doubt and distrust. It was, too, under peculiar circumstances of dishonour to God Himself in the person of His appointed messenger. Zacharias could have had no doubt that this being who thus addressed him was a messenger from heaven—one of that host of God's ministers, who

delight to do His will: and though his first impression at so unwonted a vision was that of awe and terror, yet how sweetly did the first words uttered by his heavenly visitant tend to re-assure him, "Fear not, Zacharias: thy prayer is heard." It was indeed in every sense a message of mercy; and as if to give an undoubted pledge, that he was a commissioned messenger from God, the angel alludes to that which no earthly being, save himself, could know, his own private communings with God in prayer. "Thy prayer is heard." Years probably had gone by since that prayer for a living child had passed the lips of Zacharias or Elizabeth —it had been long evident to them that this earnest desire of their hearts would not be granted to them, and they appear to have acquiesced in the Lord's appointmentwith unmurmuring submission. Yet no doubt through many a previous year that prayer had gone up before God, and, though hitherto unanswered, had never been unheard. And how often is it so! how many a prayer have parents uttered for a child, when first given to them! As a mother has folded her babe to her bosom, or a father taken it in his arms, how fervent the prayer, that it might be a child of grace, a child of God: and yet those parent's own heads may have been laid in the grave, ere the answer come, "Thy prayer is heard." It is not to Zacharias alone that this expressive sentence is addressed; it belongs to all who are praying people.

No prayer is unheard: God records them all—they are all filed in heaven, and in His own best time the answer comes, "Thy prayer is heard." It may be, the sound will not meet our ear, till we are closing our eyes on this world—it may be even withheld till the released spirit wings its flight upwards, and as it enters beneath the portals of heaven, hears for the first time, "Thy prayer is heard." It was so with Cowper, the bard of Olney—with him whose light was quenched in darkness—but oh! what a joyous discovery, what an outburst of praise and gratitude must have been poured out to find that every crumb of prayer had been carefully gathered up, and not one fragment lost! How then is it that Zacharias disbelieves the declaration, and receives the message with distrust and incredulity? The very language, in which the angel describes the character of the coming child, Zacharias must have recognized as the language of the prophet Malachi. Had he never read in the books of Moses how a son had been granted to Abraham and Sarah in their still more advanced age, and how Sarah had been rebuked by God Himself for the doubt with which she had received the promise? Was the Lord's arm shortened since then? Did not his own nation testify that there had "sprung from one, as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea-shore innumerable." It is not without especial reason

that the apostle has left on record his caution, "Take heed lest there be in you an evil heart of unbelief." It extends alike to the promises, as to the threatenings of God—but, perhaps, the greatest dishonour is in disbelieving the promises of so rich and gracious a God. Zacharias may have thought it an evidence of his humility, as if he were too lowly and insignificant for such an interposition of divine grace and favour; but he thereby incurred the severe rebuke, and the righteous punishment that followed. Alas! that any of God's children should think it humility to doubt their Father's promises, as if that Father's heart was not as full of love and tenderness as He declares it is. It is no created angel that speaks to *us*, not even Gabriel, "the power of God," that standeth in the presence of God. God hath in these later days spoken unto us by His Son, and that Son's promise is, "Fear not, little children, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

SECTION III.

(Chapter i. verse 26—38.)

One often has occasion to notice the lowly instruments whom the Lord selects for the carrying out His most gracious purposes. The birth of Jesus had been predicted from the earliest period; the declaration of a Deliverer had been dimly sha-

dowed forth in the promise given to our first parents at the very moment of their fall; and from that hour every event through the lapse of ages was more or less preparing for the coming of the Mighty One. "To Him gave all the prophets witness," and as the time drew onwards, a more than earnest expectation prevailed throughout the world of some great and glorious One that should be born. And now the appointed time had come: and the same angelic messenger from the presence of God, who had announced the birth of the forerunner, is again sent forth to declare the coming of Him, who, as "Son of the Highest, should reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of whose kingdom there should be no end." But to whom was Gabriel sent? not to one of royal rank, or elevated station, but to a poor and lowly virgin in the most despised town of Galilee. Nor was that message delivered like the law on Sinai amid thunderings and lightnings, while they that listened, stood and trembled. The communication is made to Mary alone, in her own humble home; the heavenly interview is unseen by human eye, it excites no noise, it awakens no remark, it is as though it had not been made, Nazareth is as ignorant of the mighty tidings as if they had never been uttered. And yet to every soul within that city was that annunciation of the deepest import, and not Nazareth, nor Galilee, nor Judæa only, but unto the very ends of the earth, and the uttermost periods

of time: and we, who in our home, are now reading the narrative, may well bless the God of all mercy, that "when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His son made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

How different the reception of the message by Mary to that of Zacharias! They were both alike troubled at the vision, and both alike received a similar assurance of God's loving-kindness, "Fear not, Zacharias! thy prayer is heard." "Fear not, Mary, thou hast found favour with God." And yet with the one the angel's message is received in incredulity; and with the other in the most childlike obedience, and acceptance of her Lord's word. The answer of Zacharias was, "Whereby shall I know this, for I am an old man?" the answer of Mary, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word." Zacharias demanded a sign, and one was given him in the punishment that overtook him. Mary asked for none, but one was graciously accorded in the miraculous conception of her cousin Elizabeth in her old age, and the assurance that with God nothing is impossible. It is well to rest on that assurance that with God all things are possible, it not only silences unbelief, but it strengthens under trial, and adds earnestness to every prayer. If "God spared not His own son, but freely gave Him up

for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" If He withhold not the greater, will He withhold the lesser?

"Blessed art thou among women!" You know that this salutation of the angel is one of the strongholds of the Roman Catholics for their adoration of the Virgin Mary. One is only surprised that their strongholds should be such weakholds. We should however be still more surprised if we could believe that they derived this and their other corrupt doctrines from Scripture, if we could imagine that they took their Bibles in their hands, and in a prayerful, humble holy spirit sought to know the will and mind of God, and then found or even fancied that they found these doctrines in His revealed Word. The truth is that the vast fabric of the Church of Rome was not built in a day, that master-piece of Satan's construction was gradually put together, as men were able to bear it, and as cupidity, domination, and passion piled up encroachment on encroachment, and exacted concession after concession. The tenets of the Church of Rome gradually evolved themselves from the corrupt heart and passions of man, and then Scripture was had recourse to in order to give authority and sanction to their own inventions. It is a very different thing to educe a doctrine from the simple Word of God, and to wrest that Scripture to prop up a doctrine of man's device. I do not deny that the shrewd builder of the Church of

Rome has here and there worked in much of truth: it was an early practice of his to quote, or rather misquote Scripture in order to mislead. He did it in the wilderness at the very outset of the dispensation he wished to overthrow, and he has continued the practice ever since. And yet it is from the very same store-house of divine truth that the child of God must take his weapons also. "Be it unto me according to Thy word," was Mary's reply to the angel's annunciation: let the same be our submissive, heartfelt, childlike acquiescence in His declared will, our belief according to His Word, and our practice in perfect harmony with the same. "Thy word," saith the Psalmist, "is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path," and with him, too, our acknowledgment of praise at the last will be "Thou hast dealt well with Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word."

SECTION IV.

(Chapter i. verse 39—56.)

David had long ago said in the book of Psalms, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him," and assuredly it was never more fully exemplified than in this meeting between these two holy women of God. The gracious purposes of God towards each, was a secret communicated only to Elizabeth and her husband in the one instance,

and to Mary alone in the other. Yet the Lord, in His own time and way, graciously revealed to each His dealings with the other, and when they met, they knew by the revelation of the Holy Spirit, that each had been selected as the depositaries of the Almighty's most important and gracious purposes to the human race.

I do not know a more interesting narrative than this account of the interview between these two cousins, not so nearly allied by blood, as they were by grace and by that secret link which binds one holy heart to another.

The Holy Spirit seems purposely to have revealed it by immediate inspiration to this evangelist, that the record of such a meeting might remain to all generations, not only as a testimony to the piety, humility, and devotedness of these two holy women, but of the honour which God puts on the religious intercourse and communion of those that love and fear Him. How beautifully does it illustrate the declaration of the prophet Malachi, that the Lord not only hearkens to and hears the conversation of those that fear Him, but He "keeps a book of remembrance" in which are written down all their mutual communings one with another, of the great things the Lord hath done for them. And though I fear that the Lord's book of remembrance will testify to far more of frivolous and worldly conversation, yet I have no doubt that there will be found recorded there

many interviews, similar at least in spirit to that which is narrated here. The world loves to record the conferences of mighty monarchs, or the congress of wily statesmen, and deduces many an important inference from the meeting, and the characters of those who form the conclave. But I suspect that the scenes of these holy conversations in the Lord's book of remembrance will be in many a lowly cottage, perhaps in some ward of a Hospital, and I would hope also in some family circle like this of ours. Blessed be God, we need not "limit the Holy One of Israel." Like His own sun, His Spirit illumines the cottage casement, and the palace window. The little world at Hebron knew not and heeded not what was passing in that simple home there; but there was One recording every syllable, and treasuring them up for the solace of God's children in every age.

Elizabeth was by many years the senior of Mary, and Mary had shewn her reverence for her age and station, by taking this long and expensive journey from Nazareth to Hebron, traversing the whole land of Galilee, Samaria, and Judæa, to where Zacharias and Elizabeth were then residing. And yet no sooner did they meet, than Elizabeth, with singular humility, places herself in the lowest seat, and acknowledges, without a feeling of envy, the superior distinction of her cousin. And how beautifully is this grace of humility responded to by the lowly virgin herself in that hymn of praise and

thanksgiving, which our Church, with appropriate piety has selected for her Sabbath services; and in which her sole desire seems to be to magnify the Lord for condescending to regard or look with favour on her low estate. Her spirit indeed broke out into holy joy and exultation, but in no proud assumption of her own righteousness, she too as a sinner rejoiced in God her Saviour and Redeemer; and well might she joy in the feeling that henceforth all generations should call her blessed in being the honoured instrument of the human birth and nature of the God-Man, in that wondrous mystery of God manifest in the flesh. "The righteous shall indeed be had in everlasting remembrance," and Mary's name will never be forgotten on earth, not indeed as an object of adoration and intercession herself, but of grateful adoration to Him, who had, in her, fulfilled all His gracious "promises of mercy to Abraham and his seed for ever."

SECTION V.

(Chapter i. verse 57—66.)

THE declaration of the angel to Zacharias on his disbelief was, "Thou shalt be dumb and not able to speak, until the days that these things shall be fulfilled." That day, in God's gracious providence, had now arrived, the child of promise is

given; the aged parents, like Abraham and Sarah, rejoice over a son born to them in their old age. But not yet was the punishment withdrawn; a few more days must Zacharias restrain the outburst of that song of praise and thanksgiving, which was no doubt even then swelling in his heart. Yet it was something to hold a living child in his arms, and to feel, that though he could not utter how gracious the Lord had been to him, that though in a little anger He had visited his sin, yet in much mercy He had now remembered him. I would just remark here how immediately the Lord removes the trial or the chastisement from His child the moment it has wrought its perfect work. Punishment is the Lord's strange work, and as our Father in heaven has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, so neither has He in His correction An earthly father, we are told, *may* correct for his own pleasure, but the Lord always for our profit. It is true, there are afflictions and trials that last through a whole life, and the deaf and the dumb are especially objects of our sympathy; and one is often tempted to ask, as no doubt they are often tempted to ask themselves, why they go thus heavily afflicted all their life long. There is one comfort they may especially take to themselves, that, heavy as the trial is, it is not, like that of Zacharias, an evidence of the Lord's displeasure—the blessing is not withdrawn in punishment. There is no doubt a "must needs be" in all the

Lord's dealings; and faith, and humility, and sweet resignation, and many a flower of the Spirit's own especial planting may be growing in the heart unknown even to those who are exercised thereby, and in God's own time will be transplanted to bloom in a kindlier soil.

We find incidentally from this narrative that the punishment included deafness, as well as loss of speech: and his friends and neighbours, who had assembled to rejoice with them on the day of the circumcision and the naming of the child, made signs to him as to what the child's name should be. Elizabeth had before declared that the name should be what the angel had announced, John, or in its Hebrew sound Johanan, which signifies 'Gracious.' As this was contrary to the Jewish custom, that the first-born child should be called after the name of the father, they signified to Zacharias their wish that he should select the name. The answer of the once unbelieving, but now believing father is remarkable: calling for a tablet, he wrote "his name *is* John;" not his name shall be, or "I wish his name to be John," but "his name *is* John. It is the name appointed of God before he was conceived in the womb, it is the name he has borne in our hearts and purposes, even while yet unborn; and now that he is born, now that a living child has gladdened our aged eyes, his name is still John. In name as in affection our child shall be a memorial to us, that

'gracious is the Lord and righteous; yea, our God is merciful.'" It was indeed grace from first to last —grace in the promise—grace in the mercy that spared the unbeliever, though it rebuked his sin, and now grace in the completion of all, in the fulfilment of every promise, and the realization of every hope. "His name *is* John:" and now it was that faith had done its perfect work. He had disbelieved, and was therefore deprived of the power of speech: he now believed and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he broke forth into a triumphant song of praise and thanksgiving. With the Psalmist he might say, "I believed and therefore have I spoken," though before he had spoken scornfully and in haste. And it is well that the first accents of recovered speech should be praise to Him that restoreth it, it is well that the first expression of our lips on restored health or strength should be blessing to Him, that vouchsafeth the health or the strength. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" was the Psalmist's question: "I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord," was the reply of his overflowing grateful heart.

SECTION VI.

(Chapter i. verse 67 to the end).

THE first impression which is made upon our minds on reading this inspired hymn of Zacharias is the total passing by of self, and the fastening at once on the one grand subject of God's redeeming love in Christ. Its very first words seem to be like the breaking forth of a smothered fire,—like the gushing out of dammed-up waters; as if the pent-up feelings and affections of the heart could no longer be controlled. It was as when Moses smote the rock and the waters gushed out, and that rock was Christ; for Christ and Christ's redemption is the stream that flows through the whole of Zacharias' hymn. Just remember that, for many a month, Zacharias had been deprived of the power of speech; and that as it had been miraculously taken from him, so was it now as miraculously and instantaneously restored to him. Consider too the circumstances under which it was restored to him—on the birth of the long-desired child,—that child of many prayers, so long delayed, so long even ceased to be hoped for, and yet at the last given; and given, as he was expressly told, in answer to prayer. The day too on which the rejoicing father broke forth into this hymn of praise was the day of circumcision, or reception of the child into covenant

with God, and the naming of the child—a day of rejoicing, in which the babe would naturally form the prominent object of its parents' praise. No doubt, in his lengthened season of silence, he had often communed on the unbelief which had wrought his punishment; and now that voice is suddenly restored to him; and its first and irresistible impulse is, passing by the gracious gift of God to himself in the birth of his son, omitting altogether his thanksgiving for restored speech, to break forth into that triumphant ascription of praise to God for visiting and redeeming His people! And this he speaks of as already come; not as it was dimly shadowed forth at first, or more distinctly afterwards revealed by the mouth of His holy prophets, but as already accomplished, already realized,—the mercy promised to their fathers, the holy covenant entered into with them, and the oath sworn unto Abraham, that in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed. It is not, "He shall visit," "He shall redeem," but "He *hath* visited, He *hath* redeemed, He *hath* raised up a horn of salvation for us," when as yet Jesus was still unborn. And not until he had thus given glory to God for the salvation he had wrought does he turn to his child; and even then it is solely to record his holy mission as the forerunner of the Lord, to prepare the way before Him, and to proclaim that great salvation that was in store for a guilty world in the remission of their sins!

One cannot help carrying one's thoughts onwards to the future course of that miraculous babe, of whom afterwards our Lord declared, "Among them that are born of women, there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist." How entirely, how beautifully was it in accordance with the feeling his father thus evinced at his birth; so forgetful of self, so looking only unto Jesus, so willing himself to decrease if He but increased, so humbly yet so aptly describing himself as but "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord." It reminds one of the principle which afterwards swayed the apostle Paul, when he said, "I am determined to know nothing save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." It is this principle which should mainly actuate ourselves, to make salvation, through the blood of Jesus, the great theme of our thanksgiving; not indeed to the exclusion of other mercies, for other mercies are all covenant mercies to God's dear children, but as evidencing that the great subject of redemption is the first and foremost in our thoughts and meditations; and that, in the appropriate language of our own Liturgy, as "we bless God for our creation, our preservation, and all the blessings of this life, yet above all do we thank Him for His inestimable love in the redemption of the world through our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory."

We now part with the aged parents of the

Baptist for ever on this earth; their names are not recorded again in Holy Writ; and though it is probable, from their advanced age, that they did not live till "the day of John's shewing unto Israel," yet we can well believe, nay, we can trace in that child's after-course, how carefully and how prayerfully he was trained by these holy parents in all that was "pure, and lovely, and of good report:" and how their anxious hopes were blessed and rewarded of God, as "their child grew and waxed strong in spirit," ripening and preparing for that brief but glorious mission for which the Lord had appointed him. Holy parents, and holy child! Surely we may say of such a home as this, however humble, or wherever placed, as Jacob said of his own resting-place, "This is none other but the house of God and the gate of heaven."

SECTION VII.

(Chapter ii. verse 1—20.)
Matt. i. 25.

THE circumstances of this narrative, and the very words in which it is told, are so familiar to our ears, that one loses perhaps somewhat of the mighty mystery couched in this wondrous story in the very familiarity with which we recall it to our minds. That mystery is, "God manifest in the flesh," and yet great and wondrous as that mys-

tery is, it is here more wondrous still, "God manifest as a little child, as a helpless babe." Now was the great purpose of the eternal counsels about to be fulfilled—now was that mighty plan, conceived before the foundations of the world were laid, and gradually more and more revealed through every age since the creation of that world, to be accomplished! And yet the whole machinery of that world seems to go on as undisturbed as if no such stupendous act were about to be disclosed. Herod retires to his rest in Jerusalem, at least such rest as tyrants like he can gain, as undisturbed and unconscious as if no event were to happen on that night which would hereafter steep even his soul in far bloodier guilt than had yet stained it. Augustus, amid the splendour of his Roman throne, dreams not, how God on *His* throne was overruling his own edict, that every subject of his empire should be enrolled and registered in his own city, to the fulfilment of a prophecy delivered 750 years before, ere almost Rome herself was built. Every one seemed to be taken up with their own concerns, and their own interests. Many and many a Jew had thronged into Bethlehem in obedience to the emperor's edict; and that city, little as it was among the thousands of Judah, was now crowded to overflowing. Among those who entered were too humble poor travellers—a carpenter and his wife—travel-tired, for they had come from Nazareth, a distance of more than sixty miles,

and without a friend to grant a lodging, or perhaps means to hire one.

Now I want you to go back with me to an event that occurred at this very Bethlehem a long while before. It was about a thousand years before this that a king and a warrior lay encamped with his army in the neighbourhood of Bethlehem, his native town, which was at that time occupied by a Philistine garrison, and sighing for a draught of the pure and limpid waters of the well of Bethlehem, he exclaimed, "Oh! that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!" and instantly three of the mightiest men of his host rushed from their ranks, and, at the hazard of their lives, brought David the water he had longed for. And yet now such is the vicissitude of this world's grandeur, and this earth's pedigree and lineage, the very descendants of the line of David enter Bethlehem in poverty and want; and no man ministers unto them, no woman pities the evidently approaching trial of a sister's hour of anguish; and in their destitution, rejected by every inmate, they find shelter in a stable; and a manger in that stable becomes the cradle of the incarnate God!

And was there not a fitness even in this? Of whom was Jesus to be the representative? Of an helpless outcast race; and He assuredly, at His birth, was an helpless outcast, as far as this earth was concerned. As He lay in His mother's bosom,

she knew indeed that she bore no common child; and however God's dealings, in her hour of woman's need, may have exercised her faith, they do not seem to have staggered it for one moment. And what to our eyes, and to the eyes of those in Bethlehem, might have appeared the lowest depth of destitution, are the very circumstances recorded by the angelic host as indisputable tokens of the Saviour that had been born. "Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and lying in a manger." Well may we exclaim, "God's ways are not our ways, neither are His thoughts our thoughts." And the most wonderful circumstance yet remains: this mean and outcast infant, so despised and disregarded of the people of Bethlehem, is yet that Son of David whose dominion shall be from sea to sea, before whom all kings shall fall down, and all nations shall do Him service, and in whom the multitude of the isles shall rejoice. This helpless babe of Bethlehem is that very King of kings and Lord of lords whom God hath set upon His holy hill of Zion, and to whom He promised, "Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession." It is a solemn question, "What think ye of Christ?" Are we saying with them of old, "We will not have this man to reign over us;" or with the affectionate Peter, "Lord! to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." "The Lord

is King for ever and ever." "Thou art *my* King, O God."

SECTION VIII.

(Chapter ii. verse 21—24.)
Matt. i. 25.

As one reads this first verse one is irresistibly tempted to exclaim again and again in the words of the beautiful Olney hymn:—

> "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
> In a believer's ear!"

Or to go to a still higher, holier, and more inspired source, the apostle Peter, who tells us, "To you which believe, He (Jesus) is precious;" or to one earlier still, who describes Him as "altogether lovely," "the chiefest among ten thousand." I do not say that the name alone is sweet, though every one knows what a chord of responsive tenderness and affection is touched even by the sound of the name we love. The name of Jesus too is the earliest name we learn save those of parental ties; it is the first name we are taught to lisp in the attitude of adoration, and the last, probably, that escapes the lips of the departing Christian, ere he goes to "the land that is far off, and sees the King in His beauty." The name of Jesus is so associated with the earliest recollections of a mother's gentle teaching, that in numberless instances it twines round the tenderest affections of

the heart, recalling those tones and looks of earnest love which first spoke of Jesus. It is too in the name of Jesus that the waters of baptism are poured upon our infant head,—we are enlisted under His banner, soldiers of His cross, "looking unto Jesus as the Captain of our salvation, the author and finisher of our faith, the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending." Even then, if it were but the affectionate overflowing of grateful love that thus endeared the name of Jesus; if it were but the pledge of our infancy and the teaching of our childhood that invested it with such a fragrant sanctity; if we added to all this the declaration of Holy Scripture, that "God hath given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father,"—even with all this we should have still to say with one of old, "Behold, the half is not told;" for it is expressly declared of this name of Jesus, that "there is salvation in no other; that there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." This then was the name thus given to this infant of days in Bethlehem, and announced even before His conception in the womb. It was the name by which the apostles in after days wrought all their wondrous works: "In the name of Jesus Christ

of Nazareth rise up and walk;" and when gazed upon with wonder, "as if by their own power or holiness" they had wrought the miracle, they at once declared that "His name, through faith in His name," had made the cripple whole, and the feeble strong. It was with the same name on their lips that martyrs of old went to death, and the last words recorded of one in our own land, as the flames kindled around him, were "None but Jesus, none but Jesus."

The prophet Jeremiah speaking of these days says, "This is the name whereby He shall be called, The Lord our Righteousnes." He alone can be the Author of Righteousness to His people: how could unrighteous man, or even a created angel chargeable with folly, be the author of righteousness. And be assured the name of Jesus is as powerful and mighty now, as it was when uttered by the apostles in the streets of Jerusalem, Ephesus, or Philippi. It is "His name, *and through faith in His name,*" that sin must be expelled, and an everlasting righteousness brought in: and sweet, above and beyond all sweet, is the Name of Jesus to the convinced sinner, who has felt the guilt of his sin in his own conscience, and mourned over the plague of his own heart, and has seen his need, and felt the value of that righteousness of Him, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption?" What love is ours,—is it one which

"many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown it?" such as, "If a man were to give all the substance of his house in exchange for our love, it would be utterly contemned?" Are we ready to say, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee?"

SECTION IX.

(Chapter ii. verse 25—40.)
Matt. ii. 1—23.

We all naturally hope to see old age, but it is of course uncertain whether we shall reach it. Life is like a railroad journey, continually dropping this and that passenger at every station, and taking fresh ones in, till the traveller who is going the farthest, finds but few if any of those who set out with him his fellow travellers to the last. He misses them at every stoppage; and at last his own journey is ended, and he too quits the train. It is a very different thing whether we look forwards or backwards at life; the young are straining their eyes at some distant object, which seems so far off that it never can be reached, while to the aged the extremes are so near, that it seems but a span since the days of their boyhood. You that are young will perhaps disbelieve this statement, as much as I did when I was your age; but if it pleases God to spare you to old age, and you then look back upon the road

you have traversed, you may recall to mind, with somewhat of mournful interest, the remark of the fellow traveller whom you have dropped upon the road before you. I remember reading, in Boston's *Fourfold State*, a passage in which the Scripture estimate of life is very affectingly and impressively summed up. At first, he says, "life was reckoned by *hundreds* of years. None ever reached a thousand. Afterwards *hundreds* are brought down to *scores*. Three score and ten, or four score is its utmost length. And yet, as if years were too big a word for such a small thing as the life of man, we find it counted by *months*. 'The number of his months is with thee.' But it is frequently reckoned by *days*, and those but few. 'Man that is born of a woman, is but of *few days*.' Nay, it is but *one day* in Scripture reckoning, and that a hireling's day, who will precisely observe when his day ends and give over his work, 'Till he shall accomplish as an hireling his day.' Yea, the Scripture brings it down to the shortest space of time, and calls it *a moment*, 'Our light affliction (though it last all our life long) is but for a moment.' And at last it is brought down to the lowest pitch, beyond which one cannot carry it, 'Mine age is as *nothing* before Thee.'" It is therefore not only a natural, but a rational desire to know how men have demeaned themselves, as they drew onwards to old age and the grave. One is perhaps accustomed to associate the idea of sanctity as well as

wisdom with old age. At any rate they are the natural and the graceful accompaniments of the period, and it assuredly grates upon our feelings, when we find them, as we so often do, dissociated and apart. I do not know a more painful sight than an irreligious, vain old person—one, on the very threshold of Eternity—and yet playing antics as it were on the grave's edge.

In the portion of Scripture I have just read, we have two instances set before us—one of each sex—the aged Simeon, and the aged Anna, who were both spared, the former by distinct promise and revelation, till they had seen the Lord's Christ. It had been revealed to Simeon by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death till he had seen the Lord's Christ; and it is a remarkable confirmation to the Divinity of the Holy Ghost, which Simeon here gives in his uttered prayer and thanksgiving to Him who had fulfilled His promise to him: "Lord! now lettest Thou thy servant depart in peace according to Thy Word." This prayer was addressed to Him whose word had been revealed and now fulfilled to him, and that word was the word of the Holy Ghost. It was a literal promise to Simeon, and literally was it fulfilled; aye, and like all God's promises more abundantly fulfilled than he had been promised or had expected. He not only sees Jesus with his eyes, but he takes Him up in his arms, and blesses God for the privilege, and acknowledges with grateful thanksgiv-

ing, that the helpless infant then in his arms was not only his Salvation, the Saviour of his own soul, but the predicted light, which was to enlighten the darkened Gentiles, and in the fulness of God's own time was to be the glory of His people Israel. How marvellous the faith of this aged pilgrim! what was it that he saw in the temple that thus drew forth these strong expressions of assurance from him. It was but a babe of a few weeks old, and yet in that babe he recognized the Deliverer of Israel, his Saviour and his God. Others no doubt there were in the temple at the same hour, and who saw the lowly mother with her infant child—priests and Levites were there to receive and offer her humble sacrifice of "a pair of turtle doves;" and if they cast a passing glance on the babe, "they saw no beauty that they should desire Him." Their eyes were holden that they should not know Him, Simeon's and Anna's were opened and they knew the Lord.

And in what terms of quietness and assurance does He speak of His death as a departure: and a departure, not like that of the Israelites from their house of bondage in Egypt, in haste and precipitation,—but in peace—a departure indeed from a house of bondage like theirs, but not like them to wander for many a year in a barren wilderness amid perils and privations—but a departure home, a father's home,—a departure *in* peace, and *to* peace. And what ensured this blessedness? his

eyes had seen the Salvation of Christ—He had long been waiting for the consolation of Israel—long looking for, long praying for it; and as none ever sought in vain, nor prayed in vain, it had been at length vouchsafed. Earth had no more to give, life no more to enjoy, and even prayer no more to ask for, but that he might depart in peace. It is the same assurance that must give us peace at our departure.

SECTION X.

(Chapter ii. verse 41 to the end)

THIS is the only incident that is recorded of the childhood of Jesus. One is tempted perhaps to wish that more had been revealed to us of that early and interesting period of His life. But many most conclusive reasons might be given as well for the silence that has been observed, as for the gracious condescension that has permitted this solitary incident to be recorded. It does not indeed exhibit the Saviour in the usual attitude or occupations of childhood. He is accompanying His parents to the high and holy festival of their nation, the Jewish Passover. His age was indeed only twelve years: but it was the age, at which children were considered old enough, according to Jewish customs, to be admitted to a participation even in the most solemn ordinances of their Law. And I

would here just remark how much more wisely, how much more in accordance with what I believe to be the Lord's mind and will in this matter, was this comparatively early initiation of their children in the highest and holiest rules of their religious ordinances, than our exclusion of them to a much later period. I can respect, but I cannot approve those parental scruples which too frequently debar a child from admission into a participation in the dearest privileges of Christian fellowship and communion, and to which I think I can trace in many an instance the painful neglect, if not contempt, of after years and maturer life. "Those that seek me early shall find me early," is God's own promise: and this incident of our Saviour's childhood seems recorded to intimate to us that children are perfectly capable at the early age of twelve, of entering into, and enjoying and profiting by every ordinance of Christian worship.

It must have been a pleasing sight; and no doubt there were many other families of parents and children united in one bond of holy love and purpose, and going up to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover. There is not, and there cannot be, a more pure and holy sight, or one on which God, in this incident in the life of His own Son, has so visibly set the impress of His approval, than father, and mother, and children united together in seeking and serving the Lord; and I could wish that every communion rails in our

churches far oftener saw father, and mother, and children kneeling side by side, and alike partaking of the blessed elements of their Saviour's body and blood. It is indeed a lovely sight, and one cannot help recalling that period, when believers were said to be "of one heart and one soul"—when "fathers to the children made known the truth"—or looking onwards to that period, when many a reunited family shall once more assemble at the Lamb's Supper, and many a rejoicing parent exclaim, "Behold I and the children Thou hast given me."

The seven days of the Passover appear to have been concluded, and the caravan from Nazareth, with its various families and parties, had set out on its homeward course. At the close of each day's journey, however individuals might linger with one party or another during the day's march, they invariably returned at night, each to their own company and tent: and thus, at the termination of the first day, the child Jesus was found to be missing. The following day was sadly spent in retracing their steps, and on the third day, or "after three days," they re-enter Jerusalem, and their anxious hearts are immediately rewarded by finding the lost Child, and finding Him where they did. It was no idle truantship that had detained that holy Child—it was no gathering of children's play that had caught His eye—no resort of show or spectacle that had caused Him to linger. He was not even gazing on the outward adornment of

that magnificent temple, which Herod had already begun so sumptuously to adorn; but He was within its holy courts, and sitting at the feet of its most learned scribes and doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions, and exciting their astonishment at the interest He felt, and the understanding He displayed. What a lesson for youth is here recorded! the Holy Child Jesus sitting in an attitude of docility and obedience at the foot of His teachers, and no doubt even then leading those learned scribes to meditate and reflect on those predictions and passages of Scripture which related to Himself, and realizing that declaration of the Psalmist: "Out of the mouth of babes even and sucklings, hast Thou ordained praise."

"Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business;" was His answer to His anxious mother. It was the answer of Him who Himself in after days said, "Whoso loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me;" it was the answer of Him whose charge it was, "Seek first the kingdom of God;" it was the answer of Him, whose own Holy Spirit had in times past put into the mouth of His holy servant David, "One day spent in Thy courts is better than a thousand elsewhere." And if the same love to God, the same desire and preference for holy things be paramount in our hearts, we shall find and feel that to "be about our Father's business" is far beyond all earthly ties, and other pleasures. It is the business of child-

hood and youth; it is the business of maturer life; and old age will have no sweeter solace, nor purer pleasure than to "be about our Father's business."

SECTION XI.

(Chapter iii. verse 1—18.)
Matt. iii. 1—12. Mark i. 1—8.

We may properly call this the first evangelical sermon on record, for it is gospel throughout. It preaches Jesus, it points to Him who was to come, and who was to gather the wheat into His garner, but to burn up the chaff with fire unquenchable. In other words, the purport of this sermon was to preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sin through Jesus Christ. It is a remarkable feature in this sermon, the simplicity, straightforwardness, and uncompromising plainness, with which the Baptist delivered the holy truths entrusted to him. It was a large and promiscuous multitude who had assembled on the banks of Jordan to listen to the preacher—men apparently of every grade: and with what eagerness, with what intense interest, must that crowd have waited for the first words that should fall from the lips of that teacher sent from God. The whole scene was in unison—a wilderness the temple, God's sky the roof, and the preacher, like Elijah—his prototype of old, clad in raiment of camel's hair, and with a leathern girdle about his

loins; his congregation, the armed soldiers, the covetous publican, the proud and haughty Pharisee, the sceptic Sadducee, and it may be some courtly Herodian also; and his first words are, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" There is wrath gone out from the Lord against every soul of man that doeth evil; the plague is begun; the axe is already laid to the root of the tree. Oh! then be in earnest; it is for your life. Shew that you are in earnest by bringing forth fruits worthy of repentance. Rest not on outward privileges; delude not yourselves with the vain notion, that, as Abraham's seed, you are the undoubted heirs of Abraham's inheritance. You must do the works of Abraham; you must possess his faith, you must be ready to go forth at the Lord's call, to surrender father and home and friends for His sake, looking for that city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

John's, indeed, was but the outward sign—the expressive symbol of a purer and more efficacious baptism. "I indeed baptize you with water." The Baptist himself, the appointed minister, could baptize only with water: but he could point to One who should indeed baptize with that far more wondrous baptism of the Holy Ghost, which, like the refiner's fire, should both consume and purify—consume the dross, and purify the gold. I do not wish to enter on the vexed question of baptismal

regeneration nor the meaning of our Church in her own authorized service: we shall be far more profitably employed in practically applying the subject than in any strife of words. But thus much I would say, that whatever may be the meaning or mental acceptation with which the minister pronounces the language of our baptismal service, there is one point in which we all agree—there is here no difference—Whitgift and Laud, Arminius and Calvin, Wesley and Whitfield—all unite in the belief that there must be an inward baptism of the Holy Ghost, as well as the outward one of water. We may differ as to the period when that more effectual baptism takes place, we may differ as to the mode—and I am far from denying that there are far more essential differences—but we do not differ as to the necessity; there is no disagreement as to the truth of our Lord's own declaration, that "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." It is a solemn thought, and it would be a solemn enquiry of any one of us, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost?" I would not now refer you to that inward witness which the Spirit beareth with our spirits that we are the children of God, because we may not read that testimony aright at its first impress on our hearts—our eyes may even be holden that we cannot read it at all—and we may go heavily because we cannot decypher our title and our birthright clear. But there is one evidence

which, like the apostle's Corinthian converts, may be "known and read of all men; written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart." It is the evidence to which Jesus Himself refers: "By their fruits ye shall know them." Now, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, truth, meekness, temperance." We cannot mistake these fruits: they hang in lovely clusters on branches of the Christian tree, that "tree of righteousness" which is "rooted in Christ Jesus;" and as the apostle says, "If the root be holy, so are the branches."

SECTION XII.

(Chapter iii. verse 19 to the end.)
Matt. i. 1—17; iii. 13—17; xiv. 3—5. Mark i. 9—11; vi. 17—20.

ST. Luke interrupts this account of John's preaching to introduce, though in the very briefest terms, the natural result of his fidelity, his imprisonment, and persecution. We know from the other evangelists how soon that imprisonment led to death, and how prematurely, so to speak, the faithful preacher's lips were silenced. It is often so even now—not indeed as in John's case by a harsh captivity and violent death—but in the midst of usefulness, at the very moment perhaps when "the wilderness," in which he has toiled, has

begun to shew signs of vegetation, and reward the labours of his hands and the prayers of his heart —how frequently does the Lord remove him from the scene! Humanly speaking, and judging from its early opening, the ministry of John promised a long career of usefulness and fertility, and yet he is taken away almost at the very beginning: And how often at the present day does a congregation mourn over a beloved minister, snatched from them by overwrought energies and toil; and in the mournful despondency of their hearts they are apt to exclaim with the prophet of old, when his master was taken from him, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof."

But what a lesson is here taught us, John is taken away, but Jesus is given: as, on the mount of transfiguration, Moses and Elias disappear from the scene, but Jesus stays behind. It was the very consolation of the Psalmist in his hour of much sorrow and bereavement, that when father and mother forsook him, then the Lord would take him up: and how many an orphan child, how many a bereaved one of the Lord's family, as well as desolate congregation, may set to their seal that this promise of God is true to the very letter. The disciples of the Baptist indeed found it true at the very moment almost of their loss, for it is said in St. Matthew's Gospel, "His disciples came and took up his body and buried it, and went and

told Jesus." And cannot we too in every sorrow go and tell Jesus?—cannot we, like Hezekiah, spread the roll of our cares and perplexities before the Lord, and ask of Him both strength for the burden, and guidance for the way?

The very first introduction of Jesus on His ministry furnishes an important and valuable lesson. It introduces Him in the act of prayer. He needed indeed strength for the burden, for it was a heavy load He had to bear, and one beneath which His human nature would have sunk; for though without sin Himself, and therefore penitential prayer could have formed no part of the Saviour's communion with His Father, yet He had much sin to plead for—the sin of a whole world—the sin of every child of Adam—of those whose names are recorded below, and who had long quitted their earthly tabernacle—of those who were then on earth, and of those who were yet unborn even to the end of time. It was a fearful conflict He had to sustain, in which His own heel should be bruised,—in which it should be permitted to Satan to exercise all his wiles and all his malice against Him; and He needed an especial outpouring of the Spirit of God upon Himself against this day of battle. And was it not so? Did not the Father, in His abundant love, give to Him, whom He was now sending, the Spirit without measure, and in form and manner such as had never been before vouchsafed unto a son of

Adam? The sun indeed had once stayed his going down, and the moon her course, at the prayer of man,—the heavens had once been closed and opened, and gave and withheld their rain at man's word,—the voice of the Lord had been heard amid thunderings at Sinai at the promulgation of the Law; but never till that memorable day on the banks of Jordan had the heavens opened, and the Spirit of God in bodily shape, and with dove-like motion, descended and rested on one born of woman,—never till now had a voice from God the Father, out of heaven, pronounced of living being, "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Never since that hour when, at the creation, the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, had the Holy Trinity been so manifested as now, when Father, Son, and Holy Ghost were revealed at the baptism of Jesus.

The chapter closes with the genealogy of Jesus' human descent. We had a similar one in St. Matthew's Gospel, tracing the earthly lineage of the Saviour on Joseph's side. St. Luke gives it on the mother's side, commencing with Heli, the father of the Virgin Mary; and as Joseph was his son-in-law, he is here, as was common among the Jews, called his son. I need not repeat the names now, but if you look through them, it is wonderfully impressive to find how few there are in this long series of four thousand years of whom we can say more than in the mournful repetition

of those words in the fifth chapter of Genesis, "And he died." We know not the day of their birth, the length of their lives, nor what they did, nor when they died. All of earth has perished, save their names; and as one reads this dry and barren catalogue, one is tempted to ask, as the Lord asked of His prophet, "Son of Man, can these bones live?" And blessed be God, not the prophet's vision alone, but the words of Jesus Himself declare of these, and of "all that are in their graves," that they "shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."

SECTION XIII.

(Chapter iv. verse 1—13.)
Matt. iv. 1—11. Mark i. 12, 13.

EACH of the evangelists who records this narrative of our Lord's temptation adds a particular incident which deepens the horror of the scene. Thus St. Mark, you may remember, tells us that the wilderness to which our Lord was led by the Spirit was the haunt of the wild beasts. And St. Luke adds a still more impressive reality to the trial, that the whole period was one of fierce and unremitted assault and conflict with His foe; that from the very first moment of Jesus entering that drear and solitary desert, He was exposed to all

the assaults of the Evil One, "being forty days tempted of the devil." I do not know if it has been so with you, but I can remember that in my early readings of this portion of God's Word I had thought that the temptation was confined to those three recorded assaults, and that that long sojourn in the wilderness had been employed in preparing for the conflict that was to come. But St. Luke tells us it was not so; that it was from first to last one unbroken, uninterrupted period of conflict and trial. No doubt, as the permitted season of trial drew to a close, and the tempter saw his previous attempts foiled, he came as it were into closer and more personal conflict, and brought forth what he deemed his most deadly weapons. In what way, or to what length, these previous trials were permitted to extend we know not. The three final assaults are all that is revealed to us, and they are enough not only to shew us the fearful nature of those weapons which Satan so often and so successfully wields, but the unabated malignity with which, as in the garden of Eden, so now in the wilderness he sought to ruin man.

It is a fearful intimation which is given to us in the Book of the Revelations, that Satan's power will encrease at least in malignity as well as effort as his time draweth near, and that woe will be to the inhabiters of the earth during that permitted season of his raging. "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea," saith the voice in heaven,

"for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time." Happy they that, in those days of great tribulation and great falling away, shall have their Father's name in their foreheads. But it is not so much of this that I would now speak. It is of ourselves, and of Satan's work against ourselves. We learn from this evangelist, as I have already intimated, that the Saviour's conflict with Satan lasted the whole period of the forty days, and that at the close of it, it was apparently more severe, more close, more personal. It is, too, during the whole of our lives that we are exposed to his malignant efforts. Alas! how early does he begin to exercise his power! how soon does even what we are apt to think and call the unsoiled innocence of childhood receive the foul taint of his touch! "As soon as they be born, they go astray and speak lies," is the melancholy testimony of Scripture: and the devil is not only a liar himself, but he is "the father of lies." So early does he begin his cruel inroads; and some of you no doubt can testify that the season of youth is especially the vantage-ground of his assaults and victories: and that unless carefully hedged in and fenced on every side with prayer and Bible truths, and watched and guarded by the Spirit of God, youth is the chief and favourite battlefield of Satan; and alas! too often shipwrecked hopes and shattered relics tell a melancholy tale of defeat and

And if you can testify that youthful years specially liable to Satan's assaults, I can add more advanced ones are in no degree exempt his malice and his efforts. And alas! what d of life's "forty days" is free! I fear we find that, as his time shortens, and his power any man is drawing to a close, his wrath s hotter, and his last assaults are probably iercest. Many a death-bed can testify to the mitted malice of the assailant of Eden and garden of Gethsemane; and it is with no unning purpose that our Church, in her service ıe "Visitation of the Sick," offers up her prayer er sick member that "the enemy may have no ntage over him, nor the wicked approach to him." Blessed be God! He who baffled him ıe wilderness and vanquished him on the cross .eft on record, that "He saw Satan as lightfall from heaven," even before the delegated ır of his disciples. And I would say for your ıial comfort and protection, that however great be Satan's power, it is still a limited power; till you admit him as *your* master, you are and may bid him know his own place, and ɔehind you. He may and will tempt you, but annot force you into sin. He cannot say to "Go here" or "Go there," and you must ɔrce obey him; but you can say to him, "Get behind me, Satan," and he must obey you. 'ould have been, humanly speaking, an easy

solution of all his fears to have cast Jesus down from the pinnacle of the temple on which he had placed him, and crushed life out of him; but it was beyond his power; he could only say, "*Cast thyself* down:" and so in every temptation, in every assault, you must be a consenting party yourself first, ere Satan have power over you; you must with your own free-will set out to walk with him; and be assured of this that if you set one foot in his path, you will go with him twain, nor will you be enabled to draw back without sad and bleeding evidence of the fearful struggle you will have had to encounter, ere you can get free.

SECTION XIV.

(Chapter iv. verse 14—29.)
Matt. iv. 17. Mark i. 14, 15.

In the first of the verses I have just read, we find that "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee"—nor is it without significant meaning that this intimation is given. He had been led by the same Spirit into the wilderness—it was no presumptuous seeking of trial and temptation, no rash and vain-glorious confidence in his own human strength, not even the taking of one single step, without His Father's guidance and will. He was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness, preserved by the same Spirit unscathed through the lengthened and trying assaults that met Him

there,—and now we find Him "returning in the power of the Spirit" to the more public ministry which awaited Him—not forestalling His Father's purpose, not cutting short, as it were, the period of hunger and temptation, till it had wrought its perfect work, but calmly, and passively, and obediently awaiting the direction of His Father's will, and, when He knew it, as ready to go forth to Galilee, as He had been to go into the wilderness. It is a valuable lesson to us—to seek to know our Father's will in all our way—to be earnest in prayer for the guidance of that same Spirit, that we may not mistake our own wishes for the Lord's will, nor seek to quit even a painful and a trying post, till we are quite satisfied that we see the Lord's mind concerning it, and have the Lord's sanction for so doing. You may indeed say, "how are we to know this—how shall we be sure that we are not erring in our judgment, and making the very mistake you deprecate?" I do not know any precise rules to lay down beyond that of earnest prayer for God's guidance, and the gift of His Spirit,—who is so freely promised to all who ask. I do not think that any one who humbly and earnestly prays for direction in his course, will ever be suffered to go very far wrong: but he must be honest in his prayer, and have no secret leaning to his own understanding, no mixing up of his own wishes with his prayers, but leaving the matter fully and unreservedly to God, as ready to go into

the wilderness, if the Lord will, and to stay in the wilderness, till the Lord sanction his quitting it. There is one other rule perhaps, which I would suggest, that if, after all, our way does not seem so clear as we could wish—and it may be that the Lord would try our faith by darkening our path with clouds—I would say in this case, choose the path that seems roughest and stoniest, or at any rate be very jealous of that which offers most temptation, and ease to flesh and blood. And I would lay this down as a rule, not merely to the minister of the Gospel, whose appointed place is in some dark and barren nook in the wilderness, where opposition and contradiction, if not persecution, await him; but I would say it to the parent seeking employment or profession for a child, I would say it to the child hesitating between its own wishes and a parent's choice, I would say it to a servant wavering between a lowly but a godly home, and a higher service and more ample wages—in a word, I would say to one and all that the only path of safety and of happiness is to be guided and led by His Holy Spirit, and upheld by Him in every step of our way.

It was to no smooth path that Jesus was now led—and we know where that path ended—and yet it is instructive to mark with what instant zeal He entered upon it. We have an incidental allusion to our Lord's custom of attendance on the divine ordinances of the synagogue on the Sabbath-day.

It is said that when He came to Nazareth, He went, *as His custom was,* into the synagogue on the Sabbath-day. The Lord of the Sabbath has not disdained to leave us an example in this matter, that we should follow His steps. It is true, He entered into this synagogue at Nazareth as a teacher; and it was, no doubt, a providential coincidence that the lesson of the day, which was handed to Him to read, was the very portion of the prophet Isaiah which so remarkably and minutely testified of Christ and His work. Jesus takes this passage of the prophet as His text: and, stating that it was that day fulfilled in their ears, and not in their ears only, but in their sight also, He proceeds to preach unto them the glad tidings which the prophet had so strikingly predicted of the times of the Messiah.

The discourse which Jesus delivered on this occasion is not handed down to us, but we can well understand with what love, and tenderness, and urgency of appeal He would linger on His theme. How He would tell the poor, that He had been specially anointed of the Holy Spirit to preach the Gospel to them—that His errand was to the broken hearted and the heavy laden—that He was commissioned to offer recovery of sight to the blind, and to set at liberty those that were bruised and wounded in their hard bondage.

We can well imagine how that congregation in the synagogue at Nazareth, as they sat with their

eyes intently fastened on the preacher, would be touched with the gracious words that proceeded from such a preacher's lips. And whether they took His words literally as referring to the real sorrows and sicknesses of life, or understood their spiritual hidden meaning—that the poverty He spoke of was spiritual destitution, "having nothing" —that the broken hearted He meant were the contrite for sin, and those heavy laden with the burden and weight of their guilt—that the blind were those sitting in darkness and the shadow of death —and the bondage in which they were so bruised and wounded was that hard bondage in which Satan keeps his prisoners bound—whether they took our Lord's words literally or spiritually, they were equally impressed with the tone and graciousness of what He said. And yet, alas! what a sad evidence does this Sabbath afford of the little impression, which even the words of Jesus make on the hardened heart! What a melancholy illustration of our Lord's parable of the sower, "Then cometh the Devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts," or rather of the parable of the tares, for not only was the good seed taken away, but bad was sown in its place. For these Nazarenes not only rejected the word to which they had listened so eagerly while it spake only of love and mercy, but were filled with indignation, when it was barely intimated that they might be passed over in God's righteous judgments, and would

have silenced the voice of the preacher by outrage and murder. It was with no unmeaning purpose that our Lord has left the warning on record, "Take heed how ye hear."

SECTION XV.

(Chapter iv. verse 30—37.)
Matt. iv. 13—16; viii. 5—17. Mark i. 21—45.

It was our Lord's own injunction to His disciples, "If they persecute you in one city, flee ye to another." And we have an instance here of His own practice coinciding with His precept. Rejected at Nazareth, and only preserved from a violent death by a miracle, he withdraws to Capernaum; but not in any degree to forego or evade the work which His Father had given Him to do, because it was encompassed with peril, and attended with reproach. His meat and His drink was to do the will of Him that sent Him; and neither the ingratitude of those to whom He was sent, nor the danger to which He was exposed, could deter Him from the work of love in which He was engaged. It does not appear that even at Capernaum there was much more of a willing mind to receive His doctrine than there was at Nazareth. And in one respect it was a far more guilty city. It does not appear that Jesus ever performed many very striking miracles at Nazareth. He had indeed

"healed a few sick folk" there, but their hardness of heart, their unbelief in Him, and their rejection of His message, had deprived them in a great measure of those miraculous instances of His divine power and love which He elsewhere displayed. It was no doubt a righteous retribution.—"Whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which He seemeth to have." It was not so at Capernaum; there He actually dwelt; there were some who believed in Him, and there He continually exhibited such displays of Almighty power that, to use his own language, Capernaum was indeed "exalted to heaven." And yet she too disregarded the things belonging to her peace, and as thoroughly and effectually rejected the offers of her Saviour, as the more hardened and insensate Nazarenes. Great privileges necessarily involve great responsibilities; and it is a frequent and not unsuccessful suggestion of the Evil One, that, if so, it were better to be without the privilege. Do not for a moment listen to such an insinuation; it has all the taint of its birth about it; it comes from hell, and will lead to hell. Capernaum, it is true, had a deeper sin, because Jesus preached and healed in her streets and synagogues, but Capernaum would equally have perished in her sin had Jesus never entered within her city; and the privileges which were rejected to the ruin of many were at least received to the joy and salvation of some. The Gospel is still "a sweet savour of

Christ in them that are saved, and in those that perish;" but because "it is the savour of death unto death to the one," would you therefore reject the Gospel as an unprofitable or dangerous privilege? We do not argue so in worldly things. Wealth, we know, is "an occasion of falling," "a savour of death unto death," to many, and "they that have coveted after it have pierced themselves through with many sorrows;" but we do not find persons less eager for the wealth that perisheth, or who look upon it as a dangerous privilege. I think we learn something of what abused privileges lead to in what follows. There is something very striking, not to say appalling, in this account of the healing of the man which had a spirit of an unclean devil, in the synagogue at Capernaum, and the confession uttered through his lips as to the character of Jesus as the Holy One of God. The devil knew who Jesus was,—the Holy One of God! Yet what a sad avowal is here made: "What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth?" What an agoniziug foretaste of the future doom of lost spirits in hell! "Art Thou come to torment us?" Oh! why did not Capernaum hear and understand? To the inhabitants of that city at least, Jesus had come on an errand of love and mercy: He came to save, not to destroy. For them there was a way of escape, but none for the inmates of hell,—there was no Saviour for them, no scheme of mercy, no plan of redemption that took in the

angels that rebelled; and anticipating the righteous doom awaiting them, *they* might well exclaim, "Let us alone." And yet with these awful words ringing in their ears,—with this confession and avowal of the divine character and claim of Jesus,—the besotted and benighted inhabitants of Capernaum reject every offer of mercy,—refuse to know the things belonging to their peace; and their righteous doom is, that they too shall be brought down to hell, to be the companions and associates of these very devils who believed and trembled and acknowledged Jesus, but for whom no place of pardon could be found.

SECTION XVI.

(Chapter iv. verse 38 to the end.)
Matt. iv. 13—16; viii. 5—17. Mark i. 21—45.

We have in this incident of our Lord's healing the mother of Peter's wife a valuable encouragement to intercessory prayer. Sickness had found its way into the holy home of this disciple; but there was relief at hand, which had never failed any in the hour of need, and which they felt fully confident would not fail themselves. And they immediately betake themselves to the seeking of that relief,—nay, that relief met them more than half way. They sought not Jesus; they did not, like the friends of the poor paralytic, take their

sick, and lay her in the way of Jesus that she might attract His notice, and excite His compassion; for, of His own accord, as He left the synagogue, the Saviour entered the house of mourning. And immediately they tell Him of the sad condition of their relative, and besought His aid. It might be that the sorrowing daughter, Peter's wife, was the one whose request it was; but, whoever the suppliant was, the prayer was heard and granted; and so immediate and perfect the cure, that she who but in the morning of that day was lying on her bed of fever, an object of anxiety and interest to all around, ere noon was restored to her usual health and strength, and testified not her recovery alone, but her gratitude also, by ministering to the wants of Him who had so graciously ministered to her urgent need.

As I said, it is a very encouraging instance of the value of intercessory prayer—and prayer too especially for the sick,—the sick of our own household—the sick in whom our hearts are bound up, and over whom we hang in intensest agony and love. May we pray for their recovery? Assuredly we may. May we take their case to the tender Physician, the compassionate Jesus, tell Him of their need, and beseech Him to come and heal them? The incident before us beautifully and touchingly assures us we may. I do not bring forward as an authority the apostle James, who says, "Is any sick? let him call for the elders of

the church, and let him pray over him;" because that is public, ministerial prayer: but the prayer of which I am speaking is the heart-uttered fervent communion of a soul in its bitterest distress with the God who has wounded, and who alone can heal. I know that there are some tender consciences who have painfully felt that perhaps, and especially because the trial is so immediately of God, it were almost partaking of sinful repining to wrestle with the Lord in prayer in such cases. And while sickness has kept aloof they have perhaps upheld their opinions by their practice; but sickness has entered the house—a parent, a sister, a child, or one closer and dearer than a friend, has been brought very nigh unto death. And then nature has asserted its right, and grace has sanctified that right, and they have found that prayer —prayer even for recovery—has been among the most precious privileges of a God of love. I do not say that it should be the only object of prayer —it seldom is—in those seasons of sorrow, when the heart is softened to the very uttermost, it is enlarged also. Prayer opens the mouth wide, and God's measure of filling is indeed good measure, pressed down and running over into the bosom of the grateful recipient. The very circumstances under which prayer, in such cases, is offered, leads onward to far greater petitions than mere restoration to bodily health. There is a sickness of the soul as well as of the body, and the same tender

Physician is ready to heal both—to "forgive all thine iniquities," as well as "heal all thy diseases." There is "a death unto sin," as well as a life unto health, to be prayed for; and here indeed even a tender conscience can hardly feel a scruple. There must be a limit in all our prayers for temporal mercies—an "if so be," an "if Thou wilt," in every petition for deliverance; but I know no limit —I find no barriers to the widest range of prayer for spiritual mercies. God Himself has placed none, and why should man think it humility to close what God has bidden him "open wide?" He has declared that He will save "to the very uttermost." What do we know of God's "uttermost?" Can we by searching find it out? I would say with David, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it."

SECTION XVII.

(Chapter v. verse 1—11.)
Matt. iv. 13—16; viii. 5—17. Mark i. 24—45.

It is evident from the account here given that both Simon and his partners had been before this in communication with Jesus, though they had not perhaps as yet been regularly called to be followers of Jesus. We find them here still engaged in their worldly calling, and, at the time this incident occurred, had been occupied the whole night, though unsuccessfully, in their business as fisher-

men. The gospel sanctions no avoiding of life's duties, no shrinking from human industry; it says, "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he is called," though it does add, "Let him abide therein *with God*." It distinctly declares that "if any provide not for those of his own household, he is worse than an infidel;" and its just decision is, that "if any will not work, neither shall he eat." Our Lord puts here an especial honour on honest industry, and in some measure identifies Himself with the occupation of these his earliest followers: and it is worth notice, how He has invested the humble trade of a carpenter, the quiet rural calling of the shepherd, and the more perilous and toilsome life of the fisherman, with an interest and dignity of which far higher professions can never boast.

Finding that the crowd inconveniently pressed around Him as He was preaching by the Lake of Gennesaret, Jesus took advantage of Simon's boat, and desired him to put off a little distance from the land, that He might from that position continue His address to the people. Though no doubt wearied with their night's toil, Simon and those with him gladly obeyed the Saviour's word, and were themselves hearers of the truths which Jesus delivered to the crowds upon the shore. They might well have found their reward in listening to the gracious words which fell from the lips of Jesus: but no one ever gave the least to Jesus, and

was not abundantly recompensed. Peter lends his boat for a short time, and the loan is miraculously repaid by such a multitude of fishes, that the net broke with the weight: their own and their partners' boats were so loaded with the number, that they even began to sink. Well might Peter and they that were with Him be astonished at the miracle—well might Peter fall down at Jesus' knees in wonder, love, and awe. But why should he cry out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord?" Why should he desire that Saviour, who had just evidenced such a power to supply every need, to hide, as it were, His face from him. It might be that there was something of the same feeling, which drew forth from the same Peter the exclamation on the mount of transfiguration, though so different in its purport. It was there, "Master, let us make three tabernacles"—as if he would abide with Him for ever—as if he could not endure to lose his beloved Lord one moment from his sight—but it was added, "he wist not what he said." So here the exclamation is drawn from an overflowing heart at the sight of that power of Jesus alike displayed in the deep waters as on the dry land: and the conviction of his own unutterable unworthiness and sinfulness. And yet we may well say that assuredly he wist not what he said, when he added "Depart from me, O Lord." It is the first feeling of nature on the conviction of sin. It was the refuge of the first sinner upon earth,

"I was afraid, and I hid myself." It was the feeling of Manoah: "We shall surely die, because we have seen God;" and he fell on his face to the ground. It was the exclamation of one to whom had been vouchsafed the vision of the "Lord in glory sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up," while even the seraphim veiled their faces before Him, "Woe is me, because I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips." And when Peter saw in this miraculous draught of fishes the evidence of God manifest before him, when he beheld how He who in creation had peopled the deeps with its unnumbered tenants, had now bade this vast shoal reassemble before Him, and when He remembered the momentary unbelief that had recalled their own unsuccessful night of toil to deprecate any further effort, Peter too was overwhelmed with confusion of face, and in his ignorance, in his blindness, would have had Jesus depart from him. There had been those, who had been represented as saying unto God, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways;" but far different the feeling of the apostle, and far different the result. Jesus did *not* depart from him, but drew him to Himself in closer ties, and more indissoluble bonds; and when, ere His ascension into heaven, the Saviour reënacted this same miracle, Peter on that occasion, with more enlightened love, cast himself into the sea, that he might be first at the side of Jesus.

What an all-important difference does one little word make in this prayer of Peter's—"Depart *not* from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." This must be the sinner's, this must be our plea, as David urged it for himself: "Be merciful unto my sin, *for it is great,* for Thy name's sake." Or as the Saviour Himself put it into the mouth of a poor broken-hearted one: "Be merciful unto me, *a sinner.*"

SECTION XVIII.

(Chapter v. verse 12—16.)
Matt. iv. 13—16; viii. 5—17. Mark i. 24, 25.

Both St. Matthew and St Mark have already recorded this miracle of healing the leper, and St. Luke now brings it before us once more. It is full of instruction, and encouragement, and consolation to the most heavily afflicted, the most sorely burdened: and one may well linger on the variety of topics which this miracle suggests. I would now speak of the condescension of Jesus towards the vilest of sinners as exemplified in His conduct to this poor outcast. This man, as appears from St. Luke, was no lightly afflicted one; he seems to have been one of the most heavily burdened of his unhappy class—he was "full of leprosy." It must have been from one such as he that the prophet took his description of our spiritual leprosy, when he said, "From the sole of the foot even

unto the head there is no soundness in it, but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores." Yet even his wretched case he hesitates not to bring before Jesus with the firmest faith that He had power to heal even so unhappy, and sore-bruised, and wounded a one as himself. And was his faith groundless, his hope unanswered, his prayer for relief unheard? Let the evangelist tell the result: "I will, be thou clean" was the answer, "and immediately his leprosy departed from him." But was this all? Was the condescension and tenderness of Jesus exemplified only in the cure? St. Luke adds that "He put forth His hand and touched him." You know the abhorrence, the almost loathing with which so piteous and disgusting an object was looked upon by his fellow-men —you know the legal uncleanness by which he was surrounded and precluded from all society with friends or kindred or fellow-men—how he was compelled by the law to give utterance, as he went along in his lonely walks, to that melancholy sound, "unclean, unclean," lest any should inadvertently come nigh him: and how the slightest touch, though an unconscious, and unintended one, rendered him who came in contact equally unclean with the leper himself. And yet Jesus touched him! He disdained not to come into contact even with the vilest outcast if He could thereby testify to His compassion for him and His readiness to heal him, and that there was in Him plenteous

redemption. And will He reject the vilest, and the most sore wounded of all Satan's captives now? Did He not come to give deliverance to the captive? Was not God's cry by His prophet to those who would have turned away, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" was not the Saviour's own address, "Come unto me all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." There are indeed those who may think their sin too great, their guilt too aggravated for pardon, and who sorrowfully cry out, "Yes! Jesus will, Jesus may heal others, but there is no healing for me—I am too unclean, too vile." Such language has been used, such sorrow and despair has been felt—but this leper, though dead, speaketh, and tells even to the chief of sinners, to the most unclean and vile, that Jesus not only healed him, but put forth His hand and touched him, to shew that as His touch could cleanse a man even "full of leprosy," so far more could "His blood cleanse from all sin." It were a good plea in our penitential prayer, to address Jesus as He who disdained not to touch even the unclean leper, and to pray for a like faith with him, and with her too who said, "If I may but touch the hem of His garment, I shall be whole."

It is with no meaningless purpose that the Scriptures have employed such strong language, to describe our spiritual leprosy in the sight of God: but assuredly it was no part of that purpose

to drive us to despair. And this incident of the leper, with the significant addition of this evangelist that Jesus "touched him," is enough to reassure all our despondency. And in the very chapter in which the prophet so graphically describes the leper, as I have already quoted, he as emphatically declares that "though our sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; and though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." It is no less strong language which the prophet uses when he calls all our righteousnesses but as "filthy rags," not merely rags, but "filthy rags," such as we might suppose had enveloped the wounds of the leper, and which are only fit to be cast upon the dunghill, or buried out of our sight. And yet, as if on purpose to meet even this repulsive image, the Lord represents Himself as saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." So true it is that there is not a fear, nor a care, nor a burden, nor a sorrow, but God has registered an antidote and a remedy for each especial case in His own Word of Truth.

SECTION XIX.

(Chapter v. verse 17—26.)
Matt. ix. 2—8. Mark ii. 1—12.

It is said here, that as Jesus was teaching, there were certain Pharisees and doctors of the law "sitting by." It is a remarkable expression, and

seems to imply far more than a first glance would lead us to expect. There is another somewhat similar expression used in the New Testament expressive of earnest and reverential attendance and attention, and that is "sitting at the feet" of the teacher. It is the expression used of the demoniac at Gadara, whom Jesus had healed, and whom his friends and countrymen found sitting at the feet of Jesus. The same expression is used too of Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, when her sister would have had Jesus rebuke her for not helping in her domestic arrangements—she too was sitting at the feet of Jesus, and hearing the Word. And it is said of Paul that he was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel. You remember too, how, a short time ago, the boy Jesus, when left behind in Jerusalem, and His parents sought Him, was found sitting in the midst of the doctors both hearing and asking them questions. And we have a phrase of somewhat similar import to express a constant and attentive listener, that "he sits under" such and such a minister, an expression evidently arising from the position of the teacher in our congregations above those who listen to him. But here the expression, in our version at least, would seem to imply that these scribes and doctors were sitting in no desire to learn or profit by their hearing—that they were sitting by themselves, or aloof from the Saviour, and only intent on finding and detecting some

expression or act, of which they might avail themselves to accuse Him. But, be their position what it may, it is evident their motive in attending was from no humbling conviction of their own sinfulness and ignorance, from no desire to "ask Him questions" for their own edification. And they at once evinced the purpose of their attendance, and the malice of their hearts, by their own ungenerous imputation of blasphemy to the gracious act and tender mercy of the Saviour, in saying to the poor man, who had been brought before Him, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." Why, it was the very doctrine they themselves taught, the opinion they themselves held, that sin was the source of all disease, and that consequently the sickness could not be healed till the sin were pardoned. It was the question too they had themselves asked—"Who can forgive sins but God alone?" It was therefore the natural, the correctly logical inference of their own reason, that if disease could not be removed till the sin that caused it were forgiven, and that none could forgive sins but God alone—then, in this case, where their own senses told them the malady was healed, the sin had been forgiven first, and that act could have been God's only—and then, too, He who had pronounced the gracious assurance, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," could have been no other than God Himself. And as if this were not enough, He vouchsafes another evidence as legible and distinct as the former, by

disclosing the very thoughts and intents of their hearts, and repeating the very words of their unbelief.

And may we not fear that in our own congregations, there are some who sit aloof—some perhaps who come to scoff rather than pray, to cavil and criticise the preacher's doctrine, or his manner, or his language, instead of seeking to profit by the word preached. Are there not some too who come with idler purpose, and who either sleep away the time of public worship, or suffer vain and foolish thoughts so to engross and occupy their minds, that they carry nothing away with them save the added sin of despising and casting behind them the loving-kindness of God. If they are sinners who attend in the house of God, and I suppose none will deny that it is in that character they go, and it is at least in that character our Church addresses them, and if it be God alone who can forgive sins, what can be said of those, who when God's gracious message and tidings of pardon and salvation are proclaimed to guilty but penitent sinners, evidently proclaim and shew that though they are indeed guilty, they are in no degree penitent, and therefore return as they came—unforgiven sinners. Great stress is very deservedly laid on simplicity and singleness of faith; but I think we ought to lay great stress on simplicity of hearing, on sitting like a little child at the feet of Jesus, both hearing and asking Him questions, and answering in more

than quiet waiting, in eager readiness for His words, "Speak, for Thy servant heareth." It is a very fitting posture; and we want, in these days especially, far more simplicity in hearing—the hearing ear is not enough; the open and obedient heart must be ours also. Deep impressions make little noise, like deep waters; and I should have far more hopes of the hearing of one whom I saw retiring from the house of God solitary and silent, and musing on the truths he had heard, or, like the stricken deer, smitten and wounded, than of one who instantly began to discuss with his neighbour the merits or demerits of the sermon he had heard, and who, like the Corinthians of old, canvass the respective preachings of Paul, and Apollos, and Cephas. Of course I do not speak of those who evince the shallowness of the soil in their hearts, on which the seed has fallen; who, the instant that the preacher's voice is hushed, turn round, even in their seats, to a neighbour with some flippant jest or ungenerous sarcasm. It has been well said by "the Divine Herbert,"

> "The worst speak something good—if all want sense,
> God takes the text, and preacheth patience.
>
> "He that gets patience, and the blessing which
> Preachers conclude with, hath not lost his pains."

SECTION XX.

(Chapter v. verse 27—32.)
Matt. ix. 9—17. Mark ii 13—22.

We have already commented on the call of Matthew or Levi. I would only remark on the fact itself, that it sweetly illustrates the freeness of Gospel grace, and that none are excluded from that invitation, which embraces every sinner, and takes in every outcast.

It is a valuable lesson to us never to look upon any one as beyond the hearing of the Saviour's call, or the reach of the Saviour's love: or to pass by any poor degraded being, as if necessarily shut out from God's favour. I am afraid that such a feeling often passes through our mind of such and such persons, that they are so hardened, so wedded to pollution, so chained to the world and the world's ways, that we think of them as utterly hopeless; and if told of such an one evidencing signs of alarm or enquiry about his soul, we should almost feel as much surprise and incredulity, as the Israelites of old, when they exclaimed, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" But here is an answer to such feelings in the call of Matthew—himself a degraded Jew, engaged in a degrading occupation, and sitting, at the very moment of his call, at the receipt of custom, handling and entering the very proceeds of his gainful calling. Could

any moment be imagined more unfavourable for an awakening call? or could one have chosen a time more humanly calculated to have excited only anger and repulse? Should we not have expected the busy, money-getting publican to have answered, as Jesus represented the guests invited to the king's supper to have replied, "I have bought a piece of land—I have purchased five yoke of oxen—I have married a wife," and so, should we not have expected Matthew to have responded to Jesus' call, "I am busy, trouble me not, I have no time for such an errand as thine." And yet what cannot the grace of God effect? How emphatically, yet how briefly is the triumph of the Saviour's call recorded! "Follow me" were the simple life-giving words: and "he left all—he rose up—he followed Him." It was the vain boast of a conqueror of old, that 'he came, he saw, he conquered,' and the pithy brevity of his sentence has often excited admiration: but his conquests were marked by misery, and bloodshed, desolation and ruin tracked his steps; but here the conquest was a brand plucked out of the burning, a captive redeemed from the bondage of Satan, a soul saved. There were no groans of the dying and the wounded to accompany the triumph; but, as Matthew arose to follow Jesus, there was joy among the angels of God, over that one sinner who had repented; there was a louder strain amid the choirs and harps of heaven for the son that was dead and was alive again.

And when the Saviour, in His condescending love, sat down to meat with Levi and His fellow-publicans, we may perhaps wonder why the Scribes and Pharisees should murmur at Him; but we have far more cause to rejoice, as their very murmurings drew from the lips of the blessed Jesus that precious declaration, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." One almost wishes that we could have known somewhat of the conversation that passed at this entertainment, and and somewhat too of its results; but still it is a precious gem, this one dropping from the lips of heavenly wisdom, which the Holy Spirit has selected to be thus enshrined in holy writ: and one can hardly doubt that Matthew's benevolent purposes towards his associates and companions in his worldly calling, were in some measure, and in some instances at least, fulfilled in the love of Christ toward them, and that some who reclined around that table, were among those sinners whom Jesus came to call. But these are among those secrets that belong unto the Lord our God, and will not be known till that day when the Lord shall make up His jewels. Oh! what an opening of the Lord's casket shall there be on that day: and what the poet spake of ocean's gems and earth's flowers, will then be found to be true indeed of the Lord's precious jewels. We shall wonder at the dark and hidden corners from which the brightest and the purest are arrayed in their heavenly setting. We

shall wonder at the mire and the clay, the hole and the pit, from which the Lord will be found to have hewn His precious ones; and when we see the new and heavenly Jerusalem thus garnished with all manner of precious stones and pearls, and having no need of the sun neither of the moon to lighten it, I think the greatest wonder to each will be that he himself is one of those jewels, a monument of the Lord's grace and love for evermore.

SECTION XXI.

(Chapter v. 33 to the end.)
Matt. ix. 9—17. Mark ii. 13—22.

I am afraid that there was something lurking in the minds of these enquirers like a feeling of envy, as there was assuredly a tinge of reproach at the greater liberty allowed to and enjoyed by the disciples of Jesus over the disciples of John and of the Pharisees. It would seem to betoken also a painful suspicion that these disciples of John and of the Pharisees felt the duties of fasting and praying to be irksome and wearying, and such as they would gladly evade if they could. At any rate, we may say without scruple, that it was a very unwise question, if not a very dangerous one. It is always impolitic, and betrays a wrong bias of the heart and affections, to be looking off from

our own duties to the greater privileges and enjoyments of others: it is always dangerous to look askance at the happier position of others, and to contrast their situation with our own. Our thoughts never go abroad on such an errand as this but they return home dissatisfied and repining; whether it be the disciples of John or of the Pharisees, or our ownselves, the members of our own household —the child or the youth who sees another of his own age with greater indulgences and liberty than himself, or the servant who looks to another who has higher remuneration and less labour: in each and every case, such a look, such a thought is more than unwise, it is no doubt sinful, and brings its own punishment in the yielding to it, in the discontent and jealousy it brings in, and the quarrelling even with the blessings and comforts we enjoy. We have each of us an appointed station and an appointed work to do; and the true happiness of life is in the faithful discharge of those duties with singleness of heart, as unto God. I have no doubt that every one, be he who he may, could find many who in some respects are better off than himself, and yet the very persons he envies may see in him and his position something they would gladly transfer to their own. There are those who take a great deal of pains to persuade themselves that they are unhappy and ill-treated: half the pains, as earnestly taken, would convince them the other way.

I remember a passage in *Clarendon's History*, in which it is said of some one, that "he took more pains in examining and enquiring into other men's offices, than in the discharge of his own; and not so much joy in what he had, as trouble and agony for what he had not."

And with regard to the more immediate question of these disciples, I would say that if religion be not heart-work, all its duties will appear and be felt as burdensome; as there were those described by the prophet as saying, "When will the Sabbath have an end?" whereas one whose heart was in his work as strikingly as feelingly declared of the Lord's house, that "One day in thy courts is better than a thousand elsewhere." But be the motives of these enquirers what they may, we have reason to be thankful for the enquiry; for it has afforded our blessed Lord another occasion of evidencing the tenderness that was in His heart, and illustrating His own declaration that "His yoke was easy, and His burden light;" or the equally precious and tender assurance under the Old Testament, "As thy day is, so shall thy strength be." Not only shall strength be given according to the need, but the burden itself shall be apportioned according to the strength of him that is to bear it, or as one has exquisitely said, "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb." The disciples of Jesus were as yet only in training for the trials, and burdens, and sorrows they were

hereafter to endure. A life of heavy trial and persecution, of suffering and of martyrdom, was before them; and till the period came that would demand their unflinching courage, and while He Himself was with them to cheer them on the way, He would not tax their strength, nor their endurance, by needless trials or premature hardships.

Nor was this all: attached by every tie of association, of education, of national distinction, and, beyond all else, by the undoubted glories which had ever marked and surrounded their Law, Jesus would not needlessly nor prematurely shock their prejudices by introducing the new dispensation, till they were prepared for the abrogation of the old: far less would he think to unite the Gospel with the Mosaic covenant, an unseemly procedure indeed, that, like uncomely patchwork, would only produce an incongruous appearance. Having been so long accustomed to wine of a peculiar flavour, a new vintage, even though in reality better, would at first taste harsh and unwelcome. And as indeed the time drew nigh we find Him saying, "These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs; but the time cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father." And then it was that His disciples in their grateful surprise said to Him, "Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb."

SECTION XXII.

(Chapter vi. verse 1—11).
Matt. xii. 1—8. Mark ii. 23—28.

I DO not know that it is of any moment to explain what peculiar Sabbath St. Luke means by the expression he here uses: "the second after the first." No practical bearing arises from the circumstance, except as it marks the extreme, though incidental, accuracy of the writer. But as many explanations have been given, and the passage is confessedly difficult, I would just say that the simplest solution seems to be that, the Jews reckoned their weekly Sabbaths from Passover to Pentecost; from the Sabbath of the Passover, which they called "the first;" the next, "the second after the first;" the next, "the third after the first;" and so on till Pentecost. And the accuracy to which I allude is that, by the Law, the Israelites were forbidden to eat "green ears" till the first fruits had been presented, and those were presented on the morrow after the first Sabbath: so that in naming "the second Sabbath after the first," the evangelist incidentally shews that the only period in which it would have been unlawful for any to pluck "green ears" was passed by, and that the objection raised and the remonstrance urged was solely as regarded the Sabbath-day. It was by no means an unimportant question in itself, which

these Pharisees asked of our Lord's disciples, "Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the Sabbath-days?" *Their* motive no doubt was an unkind and hostile one; and yet to address such a remonstrance to a Sabbath desecrator in our days, would undoubtedly be an act of the highest charity and love to the souls of men. We have, in this portion of Scripture, our Lord's conduct noticed on two distinct Sabbath-days. In the first, there is no mention of any act of worship, no entering into any synagogue or house of prayer; all that is recorded is that Jesus was seen walking through some corn fields on the Sabbath-day, and that His disciples who accompanied Him, as they passed along, plucked a few of the ears of corn, and, rubbing them out with their hands, ate the grain. Now a literal interpreter of Scripture might argue from this, that our Lord discouraged public devotion on the Sabbath-day, or meant to leave it as a matter of indifference, or rather, by His example, gave the preference to walking in the fields on the Sabbath. And yet we see at once how erroneous such an interpretation would be, and how illogical the inference that because public worship is not named, none therefore was practised. We were told a short time ago, that when at Nazareth, He went, *as His custom was,* into the synagogue on the Sabbath-day. It is equally evident too, that the mere fact of His walking through the fields was no violation of the Sabbath even in Jewish

eyes, for they themselves must have been there also to see Him; and the only violation charged, was the rubbing out the grain from the ears of corn, and that not against Jesus, but against His disciples. And even of them we may say, as Archbishop Leighton has remarked, that though they passed through the corn fields, yet their business and their errand was to follow Jesus. Our Lord however takes up their defence on far higher ground and shews that, even by their own law and practice, His disciples had been guilty of no violation of the day; and then, without impugning or diminishing for one moment the sanctity of the Sabbath, He would alone clear it from the encumbrances of Jewish tradition and Jewish practice, by which the outward observance was made everything, and its spirit lost sight of altogether. And still more authoritatively does He claim for Himself, as Lord of the Sabbath, the full power to abrogate or enforce such enactments as He pleased. He has not delegated to man, nor man's authority, any right to supersede His own.

We have then another account of another Sabbath, in which Jesus himself was charged with a violation of its sanctity: and yet He was then in the synagogue, in the appointed place of worship. He was engaged in His fitting work, as a teacher sent from God—for He was teaching the people; and among those who formed the congregation was a man with a withered arm. He might have

gone there with the hope of attracting the notice and exciting the compassion of Jesus; but he makes no appeal save the silent one of his suffering. It was therefore the spontaneous mercy and love of Jesus, that he who came to be taught was healed also: in the search for one blessing, he gathered another by the way. And yet this Sabbath also, marked by so much of love to the souls of men in teaching in their synagogue, and of especial mercy to one in an act of healing, is as much and more animadverted on than the preceding; and to such a height of fury were their feelings carried that it is said they were all "filled with madness," and could no longer restrain their ungovernable passions, but, quitting the synagogue, immediately called a council to take measures that they might put Jesus to death. It is a melancholy instance of blind infatuation, that they who were so indignant with Jesus for an act of mercy and healing on the Sabbath-day, did not themselves hesitate to commit a still grosser outrage of the day by convening and sitting in council on that day, and that not to save but to destroy life. It was indeed our Lord's own parable over again of the man with a beam in his own eye setting himself to rectify the mote or speck in a brother's eye.

SECTION XXIII.

(Chapter vi. verse 12—19.)
Matt. x. Mark iii. 13—19.

I THINK that we may derive a most valuable and important lesson from our Lord's practice on the evening before He chose His twelve apostles. That evening was devoted to especial and solitary prayer, and communion with God; and not only a portion of the evening, but, as hour after hour passed onwards, the Saviour was still engaged in the same holy intercourse. Midnight came, and on this lonely mountain, and in this solitary "house of prayer,"* Jesus was still praying, nor was it till morning dawned that He desisted from His blessed employment. And what was it that called forth such earnest and protracted prayer? He was about to engage in perhaps the most important work of His ministry on earth—the selection of those who should be at once the witnesses of His life and the heralds of His Gospel. And He would not commence or enter on such a work without having first emphatically and distinctly commended it to His Father's love and approval. I do not say that prayer with Jesus was the same as prayer with fallen, fallible man. He had no need to pray for guidance and direction, for preservation from error, and for insight into the hearts of those whom He was about to choose as His followers. He

* Προσευχη.

knew what was in man, in every man, most thoroughly and perfectly. He knew His Father's will, and in Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. Prayer therefore with Jesus must have been altogether different from that which man, in his hours of emergency and need, must have occasion to pour forth. And yet we may well learn from this night of intercourse and communion with God the value and the necessity and the privilege permitted to us of committing every action and proceeding in prayer to God before we commence upon it. Nor would I confine this merely to transactions of importance or of great interest to ourselves and others; but I would enjoin on my own soul, as well as on yours, the value of preceding every action of our lives with prayer. We are in ourselves, at best, but poor feeble cripples to walk alone; and prayer is the unfailing staff on which to lean, and with which as it were to pick out our hesitating dubious way. It may perhaps be said that to do this would occupy all our time, and that praying would in that case take the place of acting. But the child of God, whose delight and privilege is in prayer, well knows that this is not the case. Kneeling is not the only attitude of prayer, though a most sweet posture it is; and many a supplication wings its way to heaven, and returns even with lightning speed to earth with the sought-for blessing, while the hands are busy or the feet moving. It has been well

said, that "Christians can never want a praying time, if they possess a praying frame. In the morning it is a golden key to open the heart for God's service, and in the evening an iron lock to guard the heart against sin." We have a proverb among ourselves that "prayer and provender hinder no man's journey;" and it is an apostle's counsel, "In *every* thing, by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known unto God." He who thus commits all his ways to God, and seeks a blessing on every step, though he may stumble, will never fall; like the poor man of whom David speaks, he will find that "the Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." It may be suggested, however, that Jesus, even on this occasion, was misled in His choice of followers, for that one of those He chose proved a traitor; but it was not so. Jesus as well knew the character of Judas as He did that of John or the rest. "Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" and one can have little doubt that on this night of lengthened prayer, this act of treachery on the part of one He was about to choose was not only distinctly known and seen, but formed part of His very purpose and design in the choice He was about to make. One can little doubt that the accomplishment of all His purposes of love and mercy to fallen man, His own sufferings and man's restoration to the favour and image of God, formed part

of that night's solemn communings with His Father. For my own part I would say that it is not merely the comfort one feels in having committed one's way to God in prayer, though that is beyond all price, but the security with which one treads, even in the thickest fog and the darkest night. There are those, we are told, who "grope for the wall like the blind, and as if they had no eyes, and who stumble even in noon-day as in the night." But what a sweet message is that which the Lord sends to His own children: "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." The process is very simple, but very sure; he walketh in God, and "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." Come then, as the prophet said to the house of Jacob: "Come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord."

SECTION XXIV.

(Chapter vi. verse 20—26.)
Matt. v., vi., vii.

It is of little practical moment whether this discourse be the same as that delivered by our Lord, and known as "The Sermon on the Mount;" or whether this was uttered on a different occasion

and to a different audience. There is undoubtedly some resemblance and some repetitions also, but there is likewise some difference and many additions as well. The value of the lessons, however, is the same to whomsoever they were addressed; the importance of the truths delivered equally great in the Gospel of St. Luke as in that of Matthew. There are nine beatitudes in the Gospel of St. Matthew, and only four in Luke; but then there are four woes denounced in opposition to the peculiar blessings proclaimed. "Blessed be ye poor;"—"Woe unto you that are rich:" "Blessed are ye that hunger;"—"Woe unto you that are full;" "Blessed are ye that weep;"—"Woe unto you that laugh;" "Blessed are ye when men shall reproach, and cast out your name as evil;"—"Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you." It is God's estimate and man's estimate placed in contrast one with another, or to speak more accurately, it is God's estimate of man's estimate. The world esteems riches and abundance, and pleasure and popularity, as the great objects of attraction which she sets before her children, and instructs them to seek, and by a life of labour and toil and self-denial, as far as possible attain. God denounces a woe on them, when gained, not merely as inadequate to their end, but as leading to inevitable disappointment and failure, that "their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom go up as dust." But not only

does the Lord throw down, as it were, the crumbling edifice of man's happiness, but He tells us in what true blessedness or happiness consists, in the very opposite of those things on which the world sets her seal as her best and choicest gifts. It is indeed a very striking and practical commentary on our Lord's statement on the impossibility of serving God and mammon, and it perhaps more strongly illustrates what our Lord, in the case of an earthly parent, deemed so unlikely and unnatural, as that, if a son should ask his father for bread, he would give him a stone, or if he asked for a fish, he would for a fish give him a serpent. And yet this is exactly what the world, in its unsanctified gifts, does. The rich have received their consolation, and when they die, if, like Dives in the parable, they have set their affections on the earth, they will have received their good things here, and like him be tormented. The full shall suffer hunger, for there is a void in the human heart which the world can never fill; and those that laugh as if the present were all, shall have their laughter turned into mourning. Not more widely different are the dreams of youth from the realities of life, than the light in which the things of time and eternity are seen when viewed through the mists of this world's prejudices, or through the teaching of God's Holy Spirit. The child of God might indeed say to the votary of the world, as Jesus said to the woman of Samaria, "Ye worship ye

know not what; we know what we worship." You are following a way in which there may be for a moment mirth and laughter, but it is like fire amid the dry thorns—soon expended and wasted. There may be, and no truth is so clearly laid down in God's Word that there shall be, even to His children, tribulation in the world; but they that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him in the full harvest time of the Lord's consolations. "Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and separate from your company, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake." With what touching tenderness must these words have fallen on the ears of Jesus' disciples; and many a time in after life must they have recalled them, when they were indeed the offscouring of the world. Nor has the reproach of the cross yet ceased. The world's favour and approval can only be bought at the price of compliance and subservience; it is an imperious master, that will brook no resistance to its will, and if it cannot seduce us to walk in its way, it will assuredly oppose and hinder us in God's; and as one has quaintly said, "If it cannot scorch us in its fire, it will at least blacken us in its smoke."

SECTION XXV.

(Chapter vi. verse 27—38.)
Matt. v., vi., vii.

WHEN Saul was struck to the earth on his journey to Damascus, and heard the Saviour's voice from out of heaven addressing him, his reply, humble and trembling, was, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" It is the feeling which should influence every child of God in his walk and conversation—the question which he should put to himself the first thing every morning—the question which should be impressed on each one's heart, before he enters on a perverse, unkind, quarrelsome, and overreaching world: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" And if the question were followed up by recalling to mind some of these most holy precepts and counsels of our Lord, and accompanied with prayer for grace to abide by them, I think such an one may be said to go forth to the duties, and it may be the collisions of the day, in a spirit least exposed to injury, least liable to passion or angry recrimination, and least likely to bring back with him at night into the solitude and review of his own chamber the reproaches of a self-accusing conscience. I do not know a more valuable or peace-giving rule than that which our Lord lays down for our treatment of those who injure or despitefully use us. It is not merely to

return good for evil, to repay cursing with blessing, to love, to do good to, and bless those who wrong and revile us. Our Lord goes a vast deal beyond this: He lays down a rule of far higher attainment; He urges a grace of far more heavenly origin and growth, when He bids us *pray* for those that despitefully use us. It is the impress of the Saviour's own character and image, of that love, which, while we were yet enemies, drew Him from His Father's bosom, to become the Advocate and Intercessor of guilty man. Nor is it merely His precept. He Himself left the noblest illustration of His own rule, when, on the cross and in the very midst of His agonies, He prayed for those who had fixed Him there, and who, at the moment, were uttering within His hearing the cruelest execrations and revilings. It is indeed a Christian gem of rarest water to *love* an enemy; to do good to him is comparatively an easy attainment, and may arise from other and very inferior motives; to return blessing for cursing is not difficult for one who knows anything of Christian self-denial and control: but to *love*, to feel affection for an enemy, is to change the very current of our nature; it is the creation of a new heart, and is so utterly beyond the natural man, that it must be the work of the Holy Spirit of God. And Jesus tells us here how this work of the Holy Spirit is to be wrought in us—pray for your enemy—mingle the name of him who has wronged and

hurt you in your daily prayers to God; and as you ask forgiveness for yourself and forgiveness for him, as you pray for mutual blessings for yourself and him, anger and unkindness will gradually give way before prayer; feelings of kindliness will take their place, and kindliness will soon kindle into love. Prayer to an injured man is like oil on the stormy waves, it at once calms the heaving swell. It was no doubt a good rule of David's, when he said under circumstances of great trial and provocation, "I held my tongue, I kept silence, yea, even from good words." But he soon found out "a more excellent way," in the very contrary practice; and when he spoke of the cruel and undeserved persecutions of the wicked against him, he added, "But I give myself unto prayer." It is a common remark of an injured person, and who no doubt thinks he has attained a high degree of Christian excellence in saying it, "I will forgive, but I cannot forget." No doubt to forget an injury is more than nature can promise, or flesh and blood perform; but we must not leave our work half done, like a sluttish servant, who should sweep a room, and leave the dust behind the door. If we give our brother a discharge, our hearts should set their hands to the acquittance.* And yet in one sense I would say the same, "Forgive and do not forget." Forgive your enemy, and never forget to make mention of him in your prayers to God for blessings on him. He may never know it, nor is it

* Secker.

necessary that he should; but when you meet in heaven your mutual praise shall be swallowed up in adoration of that far greater love of the Father which spared not His own Son, but freely gave Him up for us all, and that love of the Son which laid down His life for the sheep, and who when He was reviled, reviled not again.

SECTION XXVI.

(Chapter vi. verse 39—45.)
Matt. v., vi., vii.

It seems almost a self-evident truism which our Lord lays down in this parable or proverbial saying, that if the blind lead the blind, they will, in all probability, both fall into difficulty and disaster. There is, however, a vast amount of practical caution and wisdom in the lessons which it teaches, and, perhaps of all lessons, it is the one the worst learnt and the least followed, especially by the young. It teaches us the great importance of the guide we choose, whose steps we follow, under whose leadership we enrol ourselves. As I said before, it is a self-evident truism in its literal sense and meaning, and no blind man would commit himself to the guidance of one as blind as himself, especially on an intricate and dangerous road. But if the result of such a guidance would be inevitable risk and danger, is it not equally plain that to

commit the guidance of our conduct, and the interests of our moral and spiritual well-being to a frail, and fallible, and faulty man, must be equally perilous and involve more fatal consequences. If indeed the guide that should lead me into an error were alone exposed to the hazard, and alone responsible for the consequences, and whatever the result might be to him, I should be quit and free; it would in that case be of comparatively trifling consequence. But our Lord tells us that no such escape awaits either; that "*both*," both the follower and the leader, shall alike "fall into the ditch;" and therefore it must be at our own peril, if we blindly follow another's guidance, and ascertain not with our own eyes whither he is likely to lead us. Many a man has smarted, and suffered severely by becoming surety for another; but of all suretiship none is so dangerous as spiritual suretiship. It was a striking saying of a writer of of old that as "we ought not to *defy* the judgment of the weakest, so neither ought we to *deify* the judgment of the strongest;" and it was a wise resolution of Sir Thomas More, "I will not pin my faith on any man's sleeve, because I know not whither he will carry it."

It is the Bible rule, "To the Law and to the testimony," and our Lord elsewhere warns us against relying on another man's judgment, merely because he sits in Moses' seat, or may have a name and influence among men. Of course in

religious matters—in matters of faith and doctrine —it is of the utmost consequence that we be guided aright; and an earthly teacher, alas! even while he holds the lamp to others, may yet walk in darkness himself. There is but One teacher whose guidance is unerring, whose teaching infallible: "The Spirit of Truth will guide into all truth." "Thy Word is truth." There is, to my feelings, something very painful in the tendency of our nature to call ourselves, or to affix on others the name of some human head, whether it be as a mark of distinction or as a term of reproach. I do not deny that we are all called by the name of Christ, that it is our glorious distinction that we are "Christians;" but we are baptized into that name, we are enlisted under His banner. Our confession is, that "there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved;" our acknowledgment is, that "His name is above every name; that at the name of Jesus all things in heaven and in earth and under the earth do bow and obey;" and therefore God forbid that we should do otherwise than glory in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. But I am now alluding to human names; and it is a sad evidence of our tendency to lean on and exalt human authority, that as we call our streets and our houses and lands after earthly names, and our political parties after human leaders, so religious truth or religious error is alike ranked under human appellations, and men

range themselves under one or the other banner, as if all were alike Rabbis, and they had not one Master, even Christ. I am afraid that there is an encreasing and a morbid tendency to this practice, even where I could well wish it had no place; and that even in the advertisements in our newspapers human names and human teachers, however eminent and deservedly held in high esteem, are selected to guide us in our judgment of those who adopt them as the sign-posts of their faith.

I said at the beginning that this caution of our Lord is especially applicable to the young, and I would therefore say to you that much caution—nay, much grace and prayer—is needed by you in your selection of associates and friends. You may think our Lord is not here so much speaking of them as of guides or teachers or ministers, nor perhaps, strictly speaking, is He; but you know how soon a companion exercises a very strong influence for good or for evil over those of his own set or age: and that, as even his very dress and manners are often the object of admiration and imitation, so his principles and practice gain him many a follower from the ranks of the young and the unguarded. And it is the same in every class of life. Even in a household there may be those of whom Christian prudence would say, Make not them your bosom-friends and guides; as there are no doubt those of whom you will most likely learn only what is good and valuable. If the gay and

the giddy, the thoughtless and the worldly, lead and guide and encourage one another, they will run in the same path, and make the same mistakes; and, alas! even in one deviation from the right road of Christian purity and Christian simplicity, though it may not lead to irrevocable ruin, yet it takes a deal of time to retrace one's steps; and every step is roughened, and rendered painful by self reproach and shame.

SECTION XXVII.

(Chapter vi. verse 46 to the end.)
Matt. v., vi., vii.

Our Lord here closes this discourse by remarking on the sad contrast which exists between profession and practice, and which He again illustrates by the image He had before used of the wise and the foolish builder. The professors, as described here, and as they are found in general, are loud and noisy enough in their protestations of faith and love to Jesus. Their very cry of "Lord, Lord," implies that they profess to own Him as their Lord and Master; perhaps they were among the class of those followers who anticipated that Jesus would shortly set up an earthly kingdom, and that they who testified the most zeal, and were loudest in their protestations, would be among the earliest and the most abundantly rewarded. Perhaps too,

as He had been delivering these humbling precepts of self-denial, denouncing a woe on all that the world usually esteemed desirable, and declaring those the blessed and the happy ones, who were in poverty, in need, and sorrow, and whom the world reviled as evil—as He bade them love their enemies, and do good to those that hated them, He might see in their looks, and read in their hearts feelings of scorn and derision at principles so novel, and so subversive of all they had been ever taught to value and to seek. We can well therefore imagine the Lord turning to these outward professors but inward scorners, and addressing them in the indignant rebuke, "Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say." "Why all this noisy protestation and zeal, and yet the disobedience and disloyalty of your hearts and lives?"

It is a valuable caution to ourselves, for we are undoubtedly professors; we profess to believe in Him, to take Him for our Master—we have been baptized in His name, have enlisted under His banner, and publicly and solemnly declared that we would be His faithful soldiers and servants to our lives' end. This is the profession of our faith, it is the profession of every Christian; and it is important to remember that the charge here made is not against the profession—against calling Jesus "Lord, Lord." He Himself said afterwards to His disciples, "Ye call Me Lord and Master, and

ye say well, for so I am." The profession then He accepts, the declaration He approves, if it proceeds from an honest and good heart, and evidences its sincerity by a consistent and abiding obedience. Profession then and practice, the avowal of the lips and the obedience of the heart must never be separated. In fact, profession is one of the strongest ties a child of God can have to bind him to practice; and one reason why he is so ready to do more than others, is not only because he really loves more than others, but because he professes to love more than others.

Even in worldly matters, "I will not be worse than my word" is both a pledge and a security: and though no doubt often violated, we are not the less disposed to value and admire the principle that unites both by one firm and consistent link. And so we may unhappily say that "there are many who profess to know God, but in works deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and to every good work reprobate." This no doubt is an extreme case; but yet there are numbers whose lives and practice are a libel and a reproach on their profession and Christian name: and though the profession is not the cause, it adds deeply to the sin, that after calling Jesus Lord, they yet do not the things which He says: and of such we can only say that they are like counterfeited coin, which have indeed the image and superscription aright, but are only, as the prophet calls them,

"reprobate silver," which passes not current either with God or man. And yet it would be wrong on this account to find fault with religious profession, because so many who do make it are not religious. It is our duty to profess ourselves one of the Lord's people, to declare ourselves openly among those who love and wait for Him, and our readiness to take our stand on His side, and give an answer to them that ask us a reason of the faith that is in us. But we must not stop here—that must not be all —we must *be* one of the Lord's people, we must love and wait for Him, and we must take our stand on His side, ready to follow Him whithersoever He goeth, and to do whatsoever He bids us to do. Profession alone may do very well on a summer's day, when all is bright and sunny; like the slight building which the foolish man built on the sand—but summer days are succeeded by winter's storms and there is sure to come that levelling hurricane of death, in which profession alone will stand in no stead. There must be Jesus reigning in the heart, there must be the Saviour ruling paramount in the affections; He must be the foundation of all our hope, the All in All of our refuge.

SECTION XXVIII.

(Chapter vii. verse 1—10.)
Matt. viii. 5—13.

THERE is something very interesting in the class of incidents which the Gospel selects for record. There is so much of domestic detail—of family unity—of home and household qualities—the qualities which should be found in families, and which, if found and practised there, would ensure so much of peace and happiness, of union and good-will and harmony among the different members of a household. And it is generally in these humbler and more domestic associations in which the Gospel of Jesus Christ seems to me so especially to expatiate and delight. The prophet might well predict, "To the poor the Gospel is preached;" for the incidents and narratives of the Gospel are for the most part confined to the lowlier portion of mankind, and especially adapt themselves to the sympathies of the humbler classes. It is true we have, in the present narrative, a centurion—an officer of rank and power and influence in the Roman army; and it is *his* character, *his* faith, which is so approvingly delineated: but it is in connexion with a sick and suffering servant of his household; and if the Master's kindness is recorded, no less is the servant's fidelity and obedience recorded also. It is not the centurion in his place of power, at the

head of his troop, that we are asked to look at, but it is at the kind and humane master, expressing and evincing his sympathy for a servant in his sickness.

It is too a pleasing testimony which that master gives to the faithful diligence, zeal and obedience of the servant, "I say to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." No words can more strikingly exemplify the instant readiness of a faithful and willing servant to obey a master's bidding. And I believe that the Spirit of God, who has scattered throughout the Epistles so many precepts and instructions both to masters and servants, has recorded also this narrative of the centurion and his servant partly in order to exemplify the relationship and tie which exists between those members of the same household. It is not merely that they live under the same roof,—it is not that the one bargains to buy, and the other to dispose of a certain amount of labour and service; it is a closer and more intimate, and I would add even a more endearing tie, which ought to subsist between them. And the Gospel of Jesus Christ disdains not to illustrate this by recording the touching tenderness of this heathen master, and the faithful willing obedience of his heathen servant. The lesson is equally instructive both to masters and servants, and it shews us that the Lord notices and records the conduct of each in their respective stations, and that the faithful services of the one

are intended by the Lord to secure not merely the approval and good-will of a master or mistress, but their kind and tender and personal sympathy in all their trials, sorrows and sicknesses. It intimates too most clearly how much the happiness and well-being of a household is involved in this mutual relationship, and these respective duties being faithfully maintained and observed. I am afraid that this heathen master may put to the blush many a Christian master; and no doubt the heathen servant, with far fewer privileges, and a far greater amount of ignorance than any in a Christian land, will put to shame many a brother and many a sister among ourselves. There is one more lesson assuredly implied though not expressed in this narrative; and it is this benevolent master besought Jesus on behalf of his servant. We do not indeed hear of either again in the Gospel history, but one cannot doubt that he of whom it was said that his faith was greater than that of any in Israel became an Israelite indeed of the true Israel. And can we hesitate to believe that the servant, so faithful to an earthly master, and so cared for by an heavenly One, and for whose especial healing the Saviour was sought and found, was also himself brought to the knowledge of the true God, and that henceforth master and servant were found together in cords even of closer union, "not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, both in the flesh and in

the Lord?" And I believe that our households would be far more blessed, far more households of peace and unity, that they would have far more of salvation within their walls and of praise within their gates, if there was more of this mutual seeking and beseeching of Jesus in behalf of each other: not merely in the social domestic worship, when master and servant alike kneel together before the family altar, but in our own more private prayers, when, supplicating for blessings on those beneath our roof, we take our servants' names before the throne of grace, and seek for them that, in the calling wherein they are called, they may abide therein with God; and they, in their turn, may seek of God for us that we too may have an interest in all the blessings of the everlasting covenant.

SECTION XXIX.

(Chapter vii. verse 11—17.)

THROUGH how many avenues does sorrow reach the human heart, and in how many channels do the tears of mourners flow! There are many narratives of sad and sorrowing bereavement in the New Testament; last night it was a kind master anxious and interested for a servant who was dear unto him, and was sick and ready to die. We have too sisters

weeping over the grave of a brother; a father earnestly beseeching Jesus to come down ere his sick child die, and we are led even into the chamber of death itself, where a young maiden had just breathed her last, and we seem almost to hear the sobs of those who were "weeping and wailing greatly." But here perhaps is the climax of human grief—at least to human observation—a mother following her only son to a premature grave, and that mother a widow. Her home was now desolate, and as she quitted it on her mournful errand, she must have felt in all its bitterness that it would be a lonely home indeed to which she would return, with neither husband nor child to welcome or console. The day of a funeral is a day of peculiar bitterness: it is not till that day that the heart really feels its bereavement, or realizes the full extent of its loss; till that day there is one spot, one chamber, to which the full heart can betake itself, and not feel utterly forsaken: it can still gaze and weep over the cold calm look of death, and though there is nothing to respond, "neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regardeth," still there is that which reminds of life and love and animation. But when the tenement that encloses all we love is borne from the door, and their place on earth will know them no more, then indeed the heart knoweth its own bitterness, and none but Jesus can speak words of comfort to such a bereaved one. And the present narrative

most touchingly shews us how nigh Jesus is in every season of affliction—how close at hand in every hour of trial—how soon by our side in every emergency, saying to every mourner, "Be not afraid; it is I." "Sorrow not as those without hope." It is this trait of touching tenderness in the character of Jesus which the incident before us seems so especially to point out. The poor widow perhaps felt her sorrow to be beyond relief; for she utters no supplication—she addresses not the Saviour as He stood by her; her eyes were perhaps dim with weeping, and she saw Him not. Perhaps she knew Him not; Nain seems not to have been one of the usual haunts of Jesus; it is the only time that its name is mentioned; it was not in his usual route of travel, and one can almost fancy that the Saviour had on purpose bent His steps to that city in order that He might be a very present help in the time of trouble to His poor widow. There is such a peculiar strain of tenderness on the part of the compassionate Jesus pervading the whole of this incident that one feels that the human sympathies of Jesus were deeply touched, as well as His divine energy exercised. As I have said, He waits for no appeal from the sorrowing mother, nor the attendant crowd; He stops but to utter the two words, "Weep not," and hastens onwards to the bier, and them that bare it, as if His whole soul were impatient till He had restored the son to his mother's arms. And how brief, how sub-

lime the words, by which the departed spirit, wherever it was resting, was in one instant recalled from its abode in Paradise, and bidden once more re-enter its tenement of clay. "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," at the voice of Jesus, as obediently as at the last trump, and he that was dead sat up a living man. But the tenderness of Jesus was not yet satisfied; He might have said, as He afterwards on a similar occasion did say, "Loose him, and let him go," or "Go shew thyself to the priest for a testimony:" but no; the loving Jesus—He who is so touched with the feeling of all our infirmities, and who in all our afflictions is Himself afflicted, and feels our every pang as acutely as if the apple of His own eye were touched,—He was not content even with this mighty and miraculous display of power till He had, as it were, mingled human feelings and affections, and even human courtesies, in the act of Himself taking and delivering the risen son to his mother. One is awed into adoration by the greatness of the miracle, and melted into love by the tenderness which accompanied and followed it.

Nearly four hundred years after this incident at Nain the Saviour's eye rested on another sorrowing mother, Monica by name. She was shedding even bitterer tears than this widow here, for she was weeping over a son "dead in trespasses and sins;" and she besought the Lord for him with such earnestness of entreaty, such agony of spirit, as drew

from one who knew her anguish the consolatory assurance that God would never suffer the child of so many prayers to perish. Nor did He; the same voice that said to the youth on his bier in the streets of Nain, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise," said also to Monica's lost son, Augustine, "Arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." And as "he that was dead sat up, and Jesus delivered him to his mother," so was it given to the other to say of her son, "He was lost, but is found; he was dead, but is alive again."

SECTION XXX.

(Chapter vii. verse 18—35.)
Matt. ii. 2—19.

WHATEVER might have been the motives which influenced John in sending this message to Jesus, the question here proposed by the Baptist is a very salutary and important one to put to ourselves—not in any spirit of incredulity or doubt, of distrust or weakness, but by way of conviction to our own hearts and consciences, and the confirmation and building ourselves up in our most holy faith. "Art Thou He that shall come, and have we no need to look for another?" Oh! blessed assurance; oh! precious reality! admitting neither question nor doubt, but at once coming home to our convictions in all the soberness and certainty

of truth. What a vast amount too does the assurance involve. It includes the truth of God Himself, that all His gracious promises and declarations from the first in Paradise down to the last prediction in Malachi have all been fulfilled; that not one jot or tittle of His Word has failed. And if this be so, then has Jesus come, bringing salvation unto men; then has the mighty debt been cancelled, the handwriting against us abolished, and a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction has been made for the sins of the whole world. God's justice is satisfied, His wrath appeased, reconciliation made, and a new and living way of access opened between guilty man and his offended Maker by the blood of Jesus. And if this be so, the next and natural question of our hearts should be, what manner of persons ought we to be, seeing we have this hope in us. It is not enough, however, to admit these truths, and acknowledge them with our lips; there is such a thing as hardening one's heart even against conviction. Our Lord here tells us of those who reject the counsel of God against themselves, as the Pharisees did in rejecting the baptism and mission of John. It is true vast multitudes resorted to John; all the land of Judæa and the inhabitants of Jerusalem poured forth their crowds to see and hear; but as our Lord asks, "What went they out for to see?" and what was the motive that drew these people from their

homes into the wilderness to listen to the ministry of John? No doubt they expected to see one like their ancient prophets—himself a prophet. For a long period the voice of prophecy had ceased in Israel, and now at the intimation that one had arisen and come forth in all the power and spirit of Elias, every heart must have been elate with expectation; and what did they see? Did they see the prophet they expected? "Yea, and more than a prophet;" for this was he of whom prophets spake; this was he whom prophecy predicted, and to announce whose coming and mission prophets had been raised up, and spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. One can well imagine Isaiah, like those described by the Psalmist as watching so earnestly for the morning, waiting and looking for that glorious light which should herald in "the child that should be born," and "the son that should be given." And as the watchman catches the glimpse of approaching day in the first streak of light upon the mountain top, and would call upon the sleepers to awake and arise; so the prophet, as he saw and predicted the coming of the forerunner of the Saviour, would break forth in his exulting cry, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord: make straight in the desert a highway for our God." And yet even of this John—of this glorious theme of prophet's song and Saviour's eulogy—so besotted were the Pharisees and the lawyers, that the very austerity which should have

extorted their reverence, and the self-denial which should have won their confidence, only added indecency to their revilings, and bitterness to their scorn. Had the Baptist indeed lived delicately and been gorgeously apparelled as they in king's houses, they might have looked with admiration, and bent before him with respect: had he been as the light reed of the desert, swayed by every breath of wind, now inclined to the Pharisee, and now to the Lawyer and the Scribe, favouring all and each in their turn, he might perchance have won their approval and praise. But because he came as one in earnest, as one commissioned from God, as one whose message would brook no delay, as one who knew that the axe was already laid to his nation's root, his only meed from scoffing man was, "He hath a devil."

But how truly are our Lord's words now verified, and how assuredly hath wisdom justified the Baptist's choice, and the Baptist justified the grace that led him through self-denial, and hardship, and rejection of all that the world clings to as its portion, through obloquy and scorn, and through an early and violent death, to that kingdom, where, once, the least in heaven was greater than he, and where he now forms one of that blessed band of martyrs, who have come out of great tribulation.

SECTION XXXI.

(Chapter vii. verse 36.)

It would be no office of charity to enquire who this woman that was a sinner was, even if we had the slightest clue to her name. It is a greater act of charity to say who it is not, and to rescue the name of one that should be dear to every Christian heart from the stigma that, through so many centuries, tradition and tradition only has laid upon it, I mean Mary of Magdala. Her name has indeed had hard measure dealt out to it, and though written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and having that new name, which no man knoweth save she that hath received it, yet on earth the name of Mary Magdalene has been associated with sin, and sorrow, and shame; and with strange obliquity we call not only penitents of a certain class, but our very penitentiaries themselves after the name of her, to whom, first of all disciples, the risen Jesus shewed Himself alive. I cannot find in Scripture the slightest word that gives the smallest sanction to the reproach which tradition has fixed upon her name; and though such unvarying tradition may have a certain amount of credibility attached to it, yet as it certainly militates against that rule of 'charity' which 'thinketh no evil,' I have no hesitation in considering it unfounded. The name of the person in the present incident is

not mentioned, nor even hinted at, and what the Holy Spirit in wisdom has not thought fit to reveal, it would ill become us to scrutinize. The instruction however conveyed in the whole narrative is most valuable and interesting. A Pharisee, whose name was Simon, had asked Jesus to partake of an entertainment at his house, and our Lord with His wonted condescension had accepted it, and was reclining, in the usual posture of guests in those days, on the couches around the table: and it was while thus engaged that the incident just read occurs.

There is something very touching in the whole description of this poor penitent. She had evidently both seen and heard Jesus before, and was no doubt one of many into whose hearts His words had sunk deeply and savingly, and the expression of whose love could not be restrained by any difficulties of access to Him. Though she had evidently made her way into the Pharisee's house uninvited, she presumes not to put herself forward; she stands behind at the feet of Jesus, and as her tears streamed down her cheeks and fell upon His feet, she wiped them away with the hair of her head, and ceased not to imprint the most ardent and repeated kisses on His feet. David, in his hour of penitential sorrow for his sin, had said, "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." Man may, nay often does, despise, but God never does and never will: and so

it was here. The Pharisee, unmoved at the touching scene before him, unsoftened by the broken-hearted sorrow, and the passionate exhibition of love evinced by this poor penitent, though he dare not give utterance to His thoughts, yet is in the presence of One who can read those thoughts, and who reads there not only unkind and haughty feelings towards the woman, but even unjust and sarcastic depreciation of Himself. Observe the contrast between God's estimate and man's estimate of the character of this poor woman. At her first introduction it is said, "Behold a woman in the city, which *was*, or had been, a sinner." She had been, but was no longer so: that was God's estimate. And what was man's? Simon said within himself, "This man, if He were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him, for she *is* a sinner." And how often does man in his overweening scorn, and woman too, in the haughtiness and pride of her purity, cast a contemptuous glance at an erring and a wandering one of God's family, when it may be the Lord Himself is not only yearning in love and pity over that stray sheep, but is secretly, and unnoticed by human eye, recalling and guiding it back to His fold. It was because Jesus was a prophet and knew what was in the heart of this woman, that He accepted her service of love, and spake comfortably to her, in the very spirit in which He had directed His prophet to speak com-

fort to His people: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God; speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

It must indeed have sadly lowered Simon's arrogance and self-conceit to be told by Him who had so easily scanned the unuttered thoughts of his heart, that, if not outwardly so great a sinner, he was at least in the eyes of God as bankrupt a one as the poor woman on whom he was looking so contemptuously, that like her he owed a vast uncancelled debt and had nothing to pay. I spoke just now of God and man's different estimate of a poor sinner—how immense the contrast! but not more than God's estimate and our own of ourselves. Simon, as he received Jesus to his table, might have expected to be commended and approved for his hospitality and courtesy; but what must have been his mortification, how deep his abasement, to have had all his merits summed up in negatives;—"thou gavest Me no water"—"thou gavest Me no kiss"—"My head with oil thou didst not anoint." Alas, how true a picture of human nature, thinking itself to be rich and encreased with goods, and to have need of nothing, and knowing not that in the Lord's sight it is poor and blind and naked and miserable: and that some poor outcast, spurned and put aside of man, has

had her forgiveness sealed and her acceptance recorded by the Saviour's own lips, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven." It was this sense of forgiving love, it was the dawn of hope within her heart, the precious conviction that though a sinner there was yet mercy and forgiveness for her, and the sweet assurance that however man might, Jesus had not and would not spurn her, that thus urged her to this evidence of love and gratitude. She had been forgiven much, and therefore she loved much, and desired to give public testimony of her love. Her love was the evidence, not the cause of His pardon and reconciliation. It is the utterance of the full heart, "Lord! what is man that Thou hast such respect unto him, or the son of man that thou visitest him?"

SECTION XXXII.

(Chapter viii. verse 1—15.)
Matt. xiii. 1—23. Mark iv. 1—20.

It is painful to think how many hindrances there are in the way of God's Word, finding access to our hearts, and that these for the most part arise in and from ourselves. There is indeed a malevolent and active agent mentioned as actively engaged in this work of prevention; but even he, powerful and earnest as he is in his work of ruin, has no power over any living being, save what

that being gives him. When therefore he comes, undoubtedly to see what mischief he can do, and finds the seed lying scattered, and unheeded on the path, or the way-side; or in other words, when he finds the heart of the hearer preoccupied with other subjects, when he sees the eyes, instead of being fastened earnestly and intently on the preacher, wandering after other objects, or closed in sleep, when he ascertains that every trifle of the moment is more regarded than the glad tidings of the kingdom of God, one can hardly be surprised at the result, nor could we say that it is so much from the devil's malice as the hearer's carelessness. Such a hearer reminds one of the Eastern proverb, that the devil tempts all other men, but the idle and the unconcerned tempt the devil: and as he roams to and fro on his errands of mischief, if he sees a window or a door open, an approach unguarded, and everything betokening the utmost carelessness, indifference and unconcern, it can excite no surprise that the thief enters, and carries off that which is lying so carelessly about. The other impediments mentioned in the parable are more immediately arising from within. No doubt in all and every case the same enemy is most busy, but it is in the covert, underhand way of suggestion and insinuation rather than the bold, and impudent assault. In the one case he walks openly as on his own thoroughfare—in the other, like the thief into the sheepfold, he climbeth in by some other way.

There are no doubt those who receive the Word with joy—not like the way-side hearer, sending out their thoughts to every object in their way—but these hear, and for a time are moved by what they hear. The glad tidings of the kingdom of God make a sensible impression on their hearts; they are ready at the moment to say with the Scribe, "I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." But alas, how short-lived the growth! what a vivid description does that single expression present to us, "they have no root." How soon the flower begins to droop and fade, what a sickly appearance does it present; its gay hues and brilliant tints become dull and vapid, and in a short time it is withered and dead, and all because it has no root. But one rooted in Christ—the affections of the heart sending forth their fibres, and deriving nourishment from the sap and love of Jesus—no storms could move—no temptations, no trials uproot such an one.

Outwardly in all probability the ground appears to have been much the same, for though the expression is "on a rock," of course the most unlikely of all ground for a sower to waste his seed on, yet it evidently means "stony ground," which has no soil of any depth, but which did not discover its lack of fertility till the grain had vegetated and sprang into blade. And so with regard to the thorny ground, the thorns were not growing when the seed was sown, though the roots were

there: and it no doubt looked as favourable as the rest of the field. But as the seed grew, so with it grew the briars, and in every natural heart there are the same hindrances, the shallow soil, and the choking briars and entangling thorns; nor can the sower, as he scatters his seed, recognize by any outward aspect the difference of the soil, any more than I can at this moment, from the outward appearance, judge which of you will be the careless, and which the fruitful hearer. I cannot, from mere external observation, point out in which heart worldly thoughts and cares are choking the Word, nor can I discover the shallow soil in which love can strike forth no root in Jesus. I might indeed hope of each and every one that it was the honest and good heart which, though not in all cases bearing fruit an hundredfold, may yet produce some to the praise and glory of God, though it be but thirty or sixty fold. And yet I can have little doubt that as in every congregation, so in every household that meets together to hear the Word of God, this parable of the sower is again rehearsed; and of the seed scattered, some is picked up and devoured at the very moment it falls, and leaves no trace behind; some looks well for a short season, but withers for want of moisture and root in Jesus, and other again is choked amid the crowding thoughts and occupations of a worldly mind, the anxiety of to-day, or the coming pleasure of to-morrow: and here and there

perhaps a grain may fall on a kindlier soil, and "taking root downwards," "rooted in Christ," may so "bear fruit upwards," even unto life eternal.

SECTION XXXIII.

(Chapter viii. verse 16—21.)
Matt. xii. 46—50. Mark iii. 31—35.

It is a very appropriate conclusion of the parable of the sower what our Lord here enjoins on His disciples,—to take heed *how* they heard; and we might add, what Jesus does add on another occasion, to take heed also *what* they heard. In the parable there were four sorts of hearers, and in one or other of these classes we are each one of us included, and our Lord renders the caution the more valuable and important by adding the results of each. In fact the four classes may be reduced to two, the forgetful, careless, and unprofitable hearer, and the other, both the hearer of the Word and the doer of the work, who has not only the listening ear but the obedient heart. One very important result from such a hearer is stated in the two first verses just read, that it is visible to every passer-by, and is given for the very purpose that it may be so seen of men that they may glorify God. It is the very injunction used by our Saviour on another occasion, when He

exhorts His disciples to "let their light so shine before men, that they may see their good works, and glorify their Father which is in heaven." The field of golden corn, waving luxuriantly in the summer breeze; the fruit-tree bending beneath its ripened burden; the vine with its rich cluster of grapes, are like "epistles, known and read of all men;" every eye sees, every heart gratefully acknowledges the goodness of the heavenly Husbandman, as he gazes at the splendid sight. And so the rich cluster of Christian graces in the child of God is not to be concealed from the observation of men any more than the light of a candle or lamp is to be hidden from the sight. As the lamp furnishes light by which to see or read, so the light of the Christian character, as it shines more and more unto the perfect day, serves as a guide to lead others to the same source of truth and purity and holiness. The result is indeed here told in the briefest terms: "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given;" but oh! what a vast amount of blessing and privilege, of peace, and joy in believing, and quietness and assurance for ever, does the expression convey! He is indeed blessed, for his transgression is forgiven and his sin covered.

It is, however, a very serious lesson that is here taught us, that we are accountable to God for all our privileges, and especially the privilege of hearing the Word of God. God reckons with every hearer as He does with all His servants, and He

expects every day's interest on every day's principal. Every day brings its blessing and its privilege; every day renews the reading of the Word of God; and though the Lord may not literally, at the close of each day, reckon with you for the use you have made of the opportunities vouchsafed, yet be assured they are every one booked. He Himself keeps a strict and faithful register of every means of grace He has placed within your reach, and claims an adequate return for each. He may not reckon with you to-day; He may not call in the account this year; but you remember in the parable it is said, "After a long time the Lord of those servants cometh and reckoneth with them;" and that among those servants was an unprofitable one, who said, "My Lord delayeth His coming," as if He would never come. The Lord then does expect that you value and improve the means of grace which He supplies, and he adds this encouraging promise that more and more shall be added unto you. Though at your first setting out on your Christian course you may walk feebly and uncertainly, yet strength and guidance shall be given. "He shall guide you with His counsel, and after that receive you into glory." Though at your first awaking your eyes may be dim and your sight indistinct, like that blind man who at first saw men as trees walking, yet that light shall increase "more and more unto perfect noon-day," and "the eyes of your understanding being en-

lightened," you may know what is the hope of His calling, and the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints; that though at the first there may be much that may cumber, and cause you to cleave to the earth, yet you shall hereafter mount up with eagle's wings, and be admitted into that glorious fellowship, the general assembly and church of the first-born that are written in heaven. But there is a reverse to the picture—a sad and painful contrast; and if, on the other hand, "You have not;" if in spite of outward privilege, and repeated instruction, you "have not" the root of the matter in you; if you know not the truth as it is in Jesus, and are indifferent whether you hear it or not; if, in the words of St. James, you receive not with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls, but are a forgetful and a careless hearer; then, in righteous retribution will the Lord take from you even that which you seem to have, but in reality have not. Even without grace there may be much *seeming* knowledge, but without grace there can be no *saving* knowledge. It is not the infancy nor the feebleness of grace that God will despise, for the very buddings of grace are accepted of Him; and Christ has lambs in His fold as well as sheep, and babes in the house as well as strong men.* The produce of the good ground varies through all the averages of fertility from the lowest

* Love's *Zealous Christian*, 1653.

to the highest. It is the barren ground alone, or that which produces the choking briars, and brings no fruit to perfection, on which the righteous sentence is passed.

SECTION XXXIV.

(Chapter viii. verse 22—25.)
Matt. viii. 23—27. Mark iv. 36—41.

WHAT a striking representation of human life does this voyage on the sea of Galilee present to us, and what an exquisite picture of the security of the believer in the midst of peril does it bring before us! We have once before had the disciples tossed on the same sea, and hindered by adverse winds, but the circumstances were then somewhat different, for the time was night, and Jesus was not with them. In one respect however the two voyages were alike—they were both undertaken in obedience to the commands of Christ; and in each of them therefore they were in the way of duty, and engaged in doing the will of Him that sent them. In the present instance, however, the voyage was by day, and Jesus with them in the ship: and though in reality the believer is alike secure by day or by night, with the Saviour by his side or the Saviour absent, yet, humanly speaking, these disciples must have felt peculiar comfort in the conviction that He in whom they trusted was

in the vessel with them, even though He had now fallen asleep; and that in the moment of emergency and peril, they could, as in fact they did, have recourse to Him for succour and relief. There is an interesting tract or hymn, I forget which, entitled, "My Father's at the Helm," in which a child on board a vessel in the midst of an awful storm and in imminent danger, is observed to be perfectly unmoved and fearless, and on being asked the cause replied, "My father's at the helm." The child of God may feel the same security in every hour of difficulty and give the same answer in every season of trial. *His* Father, too, is at the helm, and more than that, the storm itself has arisen at that Father's bidding. Not a wind can blow but by that Father's permission, not a billow heave without that Father's will; and though for the trial of his child's faith and for his own greater glory, He may apparently withdraw, and for a season leave him to his own poor resources, yet He is very nigh, a very present help, and prayer can awaken Him from His apparent slumber, and find instant admission to His ear and heart.

There is something very striking in the brief energy of the prayer of these disciples: "Master, Master, we perish!" The moment of emergency has no time to look about for words or phrases; it goes at once to the point. The prayer consists but of three words—but what expressive three words! It teaches us what prayer is—the real prayer of

the heart. How many a one have I heard tell me, that they are no scholars, and know not how to pray: why, prayer is the very outburst of the want, the gushing forth of the imminent need. The beggar who is starving knows how to pray for the crust he craves; the sick man, in his strong agony of pain, knows how to pray for help; the man with the uplifted sword over his head, ready to fall, knows how to pray; Peter sinking beneath the waves and the disciples in the storm, knew how to pray, "Lord, save me, I perish,"—"Master, Master, we perish." And so the poor sinner, convinced of his sin, lying low in the dust before an angry God, can cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" It is not fluency, it is not head-work, —it is heart-work: it is the pouring out of the heart of the poor destitute that enters into the ears of the Lord of Hosts.

There is a sweet passage in one of Cowper's letters which has often struck me as peculiarly touching, when one recalls to mind how many broken prayers, how many disjointed cries, must have gone up from that sorrow-stricken heart as memorials before God. "God knows," he says, "how much rather I would be the obscure tenant of a lath and plaster cottage, with a lively sense of my interest in a Redeemer, than the most admired object of public notice without it. Alas! what is a whole poem, even one of Homer's, compared with a single aspiration that finds its way imme-

diately to God, though clothed in ordinary language, or perhaps not articulated at all." It is these groanings of the spirit which cannot be uttered, or as Cowper calls it, "not articulated at all," that constitute real prayer. Man looks more at what he calls the *gift* of prayer, but it is the *grace* of prayer that has most power with God, because the faith in which it is uttered, is itself the gift of God, and cometh down from heaven and returneth thither again, laden with the wants and fears of God's dear children. To the eye and ear of man there may be much that is unintelligible, much that he might call mere babbling; nay, one of God's own ministers made a sad mistake, when he once misjudged a poor praying woman, from whose lips no audible sounds were heard, but in whose heart prayer was indeed busy, when he rashly and unkindly said to her "How long wilt thou be drunken?" It was a touching reply she made: "No, my Lord; I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit, and have poured out my soul before the Lord." And yet there was no uttered prayer; and as a dumb beggar at our gate will make signs and be understood, so Hannah is not the only dumb beggar at Christ's gate that has been relieved and dismissed in peace. We do not find the poor woman, of whom we read a night or two ago, that her prayers were more than the tears that fell from her eyes, or the sobs that rent her bosom, as she wiped them with the hairs of her

head; and yet Jesus, you know, said to her, "Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace." So here too "He arose and rebuked the wind, and the raging of the water, and they ceased, and there was a calm."

SECTION XXXV.

(Chapter viii. verse 26—39.)
Matt. viii. 28—34. Mark v. 1—20.

THIS miracle of the healing of the demoniacs at Gadara is, in some of its incidents, very wonderful, and at first sight, in one respect at least, contrary to the usual character of the miracles of Jesus. In every other instance they evidenced only unmingled benevolence and tenderness; no other feeling than compassion to the afflicted ones themselves, or sympathy with the sorrowing friends and relatives. In one instance, indeed, that of the Syro-Phœnician mother, there was apparently momentary harshness, but even then all was in reality love and mercy. But here, with all the compassion and mercy exhibited to the demoniac, there is something that perhaps grates upon our feelings, as we read of what in our rashness we look upon as an act of cruelty, or at least of unnecessary severity to harmless unoffending animals: and we seem to think that that tender compassion of Jesus, which was over all His works, is in

some degree compromised, and the value of the miracle itself neutralized or diminished by the destruction of these two thousand swine.

But I think a very little enquiry will convince us how rash and unguarded such surmises are, and that we may say of this, as of every other act of the Lord, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? You remember that on one occasion of a similar miracle the malignant Pharisees remarked "He casteth out devils by Beelzebub the prince of the devils," imputing the miraculous expulsion of the evil spirits to our Lord's collusion with the devil, and therefore in reality to the agency of the devil himself. A more absurd and untenable charge could hardly have been invented, and our Lord at once exposed its folly and its fallacy under the representation of a house divided against itself. But though these Pharisees imputed the expulsion to such erroneous agency, they never for a moment denied the actual possession of these unhappy beings by evil spirits. Our Lord however foresaw that such a class of objectors would arise, who would deny the possession altogether, and impute the violence and raving of these melancholy objects to distempered imagination and disordered fancy. And it was, in all probability to meet such a case, to refute such a supposition, absurd and untenable as the other, that Jesus here permitted these evil spirits to enter into the herd of swine, and thereby shew that they were incited by some real and un-

doubted possession. It could be no distempered imagination nor disordered fancy that simultaneously urged two thousand irrational animals to rush violently over a precipice into the sea and be drowned. There might no doubt be mingled with this motive a significant rebuke of the forbidden and ungodly traffic in these unclean animals in which the Gadarenes were engaged with their heathen neighbours; and the circumstance which is mentioned that the people besought Him to depart out of their coasts, for "they were afraid," seems to imply that they were aware of their transgression of the Law, and that this event had brought it more forcibly to their recollection, and that they dreaded a still sorer punishment as well as the prohibition of their future ungodly gains. Alas! how does one sin creep on, till it eats up all anxiety, all care about the soul and eternal objects! how does one sinful, but gainful traffic, like a canker, gradually destroy all vitality, and strip off not only every remnant of godliness, but even the very form and outward shell. These Gadarenes, when they poured out their crowds from Gergesa to go to Jesus did not even assume the semblance of reverence or courtesy, they proffered no hospitality, they invited not Jesus and His disciples, tempest tossed though they were, to rest awhile—they expressed no wonder, no admiration at the miracle, no gratitude at the sight which met their eyes of the man out of whom the devils had de-

parted, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. All that they had eyes for was their empty swine-folds, their traffic swept away, their gains crushed, and their sin rebuked—and alas, we may add, though they saw it not, their hearts hardened also.

It is no insignificant word which the evangelist here uses, "they were afraid." It was no godly fear which worketh repentance unto life; it was not that self abasement which led Peter, at the sight of one of his Lord's miracles, to cry out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord;" it was not that sense of conscious guilt, which led Adam to hide himself from God's presence, "for he was afraid." It was rather that hard and callous insensibility, which unsanctified prosperity, especially when arrested in its gains, so usually engenders. These are they, whom Job represents as spending their days in wealth, and *therefore* saying unto God, "Depart from us for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways—what is the Almighty that we should serve Him, and what profit should we have if we pray unto Him." And from some such feeling it was that these Gadarenes, when they saw Jesus besought Him "that He too would depart from them out of their coasts." Alas for them! their prayer was answered —Jesus "went up into the ship, and returned back again"—and they in all probability returned to their ungodly and illegal traffic, with the more

eagerness for the loss they had sustained, as the sow returns to its wallowing in the mire.

SECTION XXXVI.

(Chapter viii. verse 40—48.)
Matt. ix. 18—26. Mark v. 21—43.

THERE is a strange mixture of faith and credulity in the conduct of this poor woman, who mingled in the throng that crowded around the Saviour, as He was proceeding to the house of Jairus. Her faith must indeed have been strong in the assurance that by merely touching the border of His garment she should at once be healed of a malady which had lasted for twelve years and had baffled all the skill and efforts of the Physicians. It was the prayer of faith, which the Spirit put into the mouth of His prophet Jeremiah, when he cried, "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed—save me, and I shall be saved." So this poor woman never hesitates a moment in her confidence; and her faith had its expected end, for immediately her issue of blood was stanched. Yet what an exhibition of credulity and ignorance did she manifest in the supposition that she could, as it were, steal this cure from Jesus without His knowledge or even suspicion of the fact. She might indeed have touched the border of the garment of any other

in that crowd, and not one would have known or felt the touch; but then from no other than the Saviour's robe would healing power have emanated, and she seems almost to have acted, as if the power to heal was in the garment, and not in Jesus Himself. Had she reasoned correctly, she must have come to the conclusion that the same power which willed the cure, could at once detect the act. And so it proved—for Jesus immediately asked "Who touched me" in order to draw forth this poor trembling creature's faith, and assure her of the tender compassion of Him, whom she had so confidingly sought.

Amid so much of faith one mourns to see so much of weakness, so much of dross even amid the fine gold; for one cannot help thinking that the supposition started by Peter had suggested itself to her own mind, and that she had hoped, amid so great a crowd, her own individual act would remain, not perhaps unnoticed, but at least undetected, and be imputed to some undesigned pressure of the people. Alas! and is not a similar thought very often passing through the minds of many, that perhaps a very little sin, a very little transgression may pass unnoticed amid so many. The eyes of Jesus were not on this woman, as she drew near to him—she came behind Him, and unnoticed by any of those around her, accomplished her purpose; she stole, as she thought, the cure, and deemed the Saviour as unwitting of her act as

the rest around Him. But, "Went not mine heart with thee?" said the prophet to his servant on his secret errand of guilt; and went not the heart of Jesus with every step of this poor sufferer: nay, during those twelve years of disappointed hopes and protracted sufferings, had He not been a witness of every thought of her heart, heard every prayer even in her secret chamber, and now by His grace and Spirit prompted and led her to the very act she had done.

It was but a touch, and that on the mere hem of His garment—it was not as when handkerchiefs or aprons from the body of Paul were brought to the sick to heal them—"If I may but touch the hem of his garment I shall be whole," so slight, that she might well hope to escape undetected. It was in a different spirit, yet with somewhat of similar disbelief of God's omniscience, that the patriarch's wife, Sarah, when charged with laughing at God's promise of a son in her old age, denied it—she had but laughed within herself, and who could know of that? so this woman came behind and touched but the hem of the garment of Jesus, and hoped amid the crowd to escape unknown. Yet happier far than Sarah she sought not to hide her act under a falsehood; for no sooner did the Lord make enquiry, who touched me? than she threw herself at the feet of Jesus, and declared in the presence of the whole multitude the motives and the purpose for which she had sought Jesus, and

how she had been healed immediately. Oh! how many a one will that last day disclose, who with equal faith, but it may be with equal timidity, have yet gone to Jesus with sins, not of twelve years alone, but of a whole life, with the pollutions even of three or four-score years, and who, unnoticed by and unknown to their fellow-men, have laid hold on Jesus, it may be, but by the hem of His garment, resting on that promise which has never failed, "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." And there is another most important lesson to be learned here—who touched me? It was but a touch, yet Jesus noticed it and made enquiries about it: and so, be assured, there is no privilege granted, no mercy vouchsafed, no trial lightened, no sorrow soothed, nor suffering abated, but Jesus enquires after it. No doubt there are many that we have forgotten, we may not be able to trace each step of mercy or of trial, by which the Lord hath guided us to Himself, any more than this poor woman could have told the process by which she was led to Jesus—but like her, let us feel within ourselves that we are healed of the disease of sin, and that too, by deriving both healing and holiness from that robe of Jesus, which is the righteousness of His saints.

SECTION XXXVII.

(Chapter viii. verse 49 to the end.)
Matt. ix. 18—26. Mark v. 21—43.

How closely do joy and sorrow tread on each other's heels! Last night we had the poor woman, who had touched the hem of Jesus' garment, rejoicing in her miraculous cure—and we heard the compassionate Saviour bidding her return to her home in peace, for her faith had made her whole. Yet scarcely had Jesus uttered these words of love and mercy, nay even while He was yet speaking, a messenger arrives to announce that death had already seized the young daughter of the ruler of the synagogue, and added that it was now useless and hopeless to trouble Jesus any further. Jairus was himself present at the receipt of this intelligence: he had gone in person to beseech Jesus to come without delay to his house to restore his only child, who was in the last extremity of sickness, and was himself accompanying and guiding the Saviour on His way to his house. He might perhaps at the moment have felt distress at the detention, which had stayed the Saviour's steps, even though for an act of humanity and mercy, and yet how must his heart have rejoiced at the manifestation of such power to heal! How would his thoughts instantly recur to his own sick child's chamber, and picture the scene of her

restoration to instant health by a life-giving word from the lips of one so mighty to save! How would he sympathize with this poor healed one in the gracious words addressed to her by Jesus, "Thy faith hath made thee whole, go in peace." And yet at this very moment of indulged hope, when his heart was yet throbbing with the intensest eagerness and anxiety, the messenger of sorrow announces a death-blow to every hope, "Thy daughter is dead, trouble not the Master." How sweetly does the narrative intimate the tender mercy and compassionate love of Jesus—He waits for no appeal from the bereaved and sorrowing father—He reads perhaps the agony of his heart in his countenance, and at once relieves his sorrow by saying, "Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole." You have seen the power of faith in this poor woman, how it drew her, though in secrecy, to touch but the fringe of My garment, and her disease, which began ere thy child's life began, has yielded to my power. Exercise only the same faith—believe only like her, and thy daughter too shall be made whole. I think I can now see another motive of kindness, which thus led the Saviour to draw forth this woman's cure to public notice—not only to evidence and confirm the faith of the sufferer herself, and assuredly not to testify to the thronging crowds that He had done another deed of mercy—but to encourage a poor sorrow-stricken father, whose fears were

great, and whose faith little, whose affections were strong, and therefore his afflictions heavy, and whose life was bound up in that of his child, to assure his hopes, to build up his faith, that ere he reached his own door he might be a fitting recipient of the Lord's mercy—in the full assurance that He, who had permitted healing virtue, like precious ointment, to descend even to the skirts of His garment, could arrest not disease only, but death itself, and bid him give up his slain.

I would remark too on the extreme brevity and simplicity of the Lord's injunction: a time of sorrow is no time for intricate discussions, or unkind rebuke—it is a time to build up and not to pull down—it is a time to heal and not to add to the wound; and he mistakes, I think, his mission much, who enters a chamber of sickness or sorrow with harshness on his lips, or looks upon it as a fitting arena for discussion on his own favored views. Jesus here sets us a very different example; as regards the poor father, it is the simplest, and yet the surest truth—and were the guiltiest sinner to bring his terrors and his anguish to one of God's ministers and ask what he should do to be saved, I know no other answer, I could tell him no other hope, than that which Jesus gave, and His apostle repeated. "Believe only"—was the precept of the Saviour—"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," the addition of the other.

I hardly need add a word on that wretched

sophistry of man, which has extracted from our Lord's words on this occasion a licence for what they call mental reservation, or, in other words, an excuse to utter a falsehood, if you qualify it by some expression to yourself under breath, explanatory of our real meaning. There are unhappily books, in which this doctrine is taught—there is, alas! a Church whose ministers are empowered and charged to teach it, and whose canonized Saints in their written and authorized works, have revealed all "the dark chambers" of this polluted practice. But one need not go far to point out its origin and birth—Jesus has sealed it with His own seal and impress, which no ingenuity of man can efface, when He said of the devil, "There is no truth in him—when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar and the father of it." "She is not dead"—and yet she *was* dead, as Jesus Himself knew, as the broken-hearted parents knew, and as the hired mourners knew, who laughed the assertion to scorn. And therefore man has explained the words by supposing that Jesus, the God of all truth, who is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life, qualified it in His own mind by saying, "She is not dead"—"as regards my power"—not dead, "irrevocably and for ever" —not dead, "for in a few moments she shall be alive again." Poor subterfuge! miserable sophistry. It was a blessed truth which our Lord uttered—and one which has shed light and conso-

lation over thousands and thousands of dying beds, and over unnumbered mourners' hearts ever since. "She is not dead, *but* sleepeth," and blessed be God, and blessed be the Lord Jesus, the rest of the grave is but a sweet and short slumber, and they that sleep in Jesus shall awake in Jesus. "Lazarus sleepeth, and I go to awake him out of sleep"—the little maiden was not dead, but sleeping in Jesus. And oh what an image of death is that—divested of all its terrors, all its repulsiveness—calm as an infant's slumber, and with the morning soon to break in upon the sleep: and how consolingly does the apostle, and our Church recognize the same truth, when in our burial service we are bidden "not to be sorry, as men without hope, for them *that sleep in Jesus.*"

SECTION XXXVIII.

(Chapter ix. verses 1—6.)
Matt. x., xi. 1, Mark vi. 7—13.

THE instructions given by our Lord to his disciples on sending them forth on their errand, to "preach the kingdom of God," are very much shorter in this narrative of St. Luke than they were in the preceding Gospel of St. Matthew. Yet even here we find quite enough to shew us on what an errand of apparent peril and privation they were proceeding, and how strong must have

been their faith in their Master's protection and power to enable them to set out with cheerfulness and alacrity on such a mission of toil and danger. It is so at variance with the practice of the world, nay, of the commonest prudence, to undertake a mission involving so many risks, and occupying so much time, without the smallest resources, even for the passing day, much less the coming morrow, that there must have been a supernatural energy and grace accompanying the words of their Master which lifted up these disciples, as it were, above the apprehensions which must otherwise have assailed them; and when our Lord gave them miraculous powers to heal the sick, he endued them also with energy from on high, cheerfully to encounter everything for their Master's sake, and count it but loss in comparison with doing His will. Nor do I think that the miraculous provision of the Saviour stopped here, for it would not have been sufficient, and God never leaves a necessary want of His children uncared or unprovided for. It was not enough that these first missionaries of Gospel truth should have been willing to go, and ready to encounter privation and peril; they had bodies to sustain, and natural wants to care for; and as no means of their own were permitted to purchase, there must have been every day and in every place some hearts, like Lydia's, "opened of the Lord," not only to attend to the things spoken, but to bid them come into their

house and abide there. It was indeed declared that "the workman is worthy of his meat," and "the labourer of his hire," and that they who preach the Gospel should "live of the Gospel," but it is not always true that the meat is ready for the workman, or the hire for the labourer, and there is hardly anything which men grudge so much as provision for them that preach the Gospel. At the present day, our missionary societies justly deem money the indispensable means of carrying on their work, and there can be no doubt, that, as it is now, so it was then, that no man could set out on a journey, and on such an errand too, as would be far more likely to provoke opposition than to conciliate esteem, and carry it to its close without the slightest provision for every arising want, unless there was a manifest and miraculous overruling of men's natural hearts to receive and welcome and support them. Hospitality no doubt was more extensively exercised in Eastern climes and in ancient times than it is in our own country, or in the present day,—the host of to-day might be the guest of to-morrow, and he who distributed such kindness to the weary and needy traveller to-day, might ere long need it as a traveller himself. But still this will not meet the apostle's case, and there must therefore have been a merciful provision and supply for every day's need. I do not mean in a miraculous creation of food, such as is recorded in this very chapter, but in an almost equally mi-

raculous opening of men's hearts and houses to receive and entertain them. It is a valuable lesson to ourselves, to every one, not to be discouraged by difficulties in the way of duty,—if we are assured that our path is plain before us, that there is a voice within, saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it;" then, I would say, boldly and unhesitatingly walk in that way, however it may be encompassed with difficulty, reproach, or even danger and distress. It is not likely that any of us will be called upon to exercise the same faith in the same path that these Christian missionaries trod: but the path of Christian duty, the path of self-denial, of uncompromising separation from the world, and the path of holiness equally requires a faith as strong, as lively, as unremitting, and as prayerful, as the most toilsome path of missionary enterprize. An idol in the heart is as difficult to dislodge as an idol in an heathen grove or temple; and our Lord indicated no trifling conflict, no surface wound, when He compared the rooting out of an evil passion, or lust, or temper, to the cutting off an hand or foot or plucking out an eye. This is a work which we all have to do, and on which we should begin without delay; for let me add, what indeed our own reason tells us, that difficult and painful as it is at every age, and impossible at any without the grace of God, it is still the easiest in youth, and the most difficult in age. Delay it, and every day strikes the

root deeper, and every year encreases its growth; and therefore, in this matter especially, as in every other, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might."

SECTION XXXIX.

(Chapter ix. verse 7—9.)
Matt. xiv. 1, 2. Mark vi. 14—16.

St. Luke here altogether omits the sad and guilty circumstances attending the death of John the Baptist; but he confirms the fact of Herod's fears and perplexities in consequence of that event. I am far from saying that this was the only deed of sin that stained Herod's conscience. The very cause of the murder of the Baptist was a sin of deepest dye, but that never seems to have disturbed his conscience; he continued to cleave to it to the very last, and yet with regard to the death of John, from the hour of its perpetration, he was full of remorse and terror. And, probably, in the hour of righteous retribution, which finally overtook the guilty three, the recollection of that night of revelry may have added a tenfold deeper sting to exile, and the loss of his throne; and in the premature death of her daughter, Herodias may have recognized an offended God avenging the death of His saint. And the lesson I would impress on ourselves from this event

is, that there is a sorrow even for sin, which is not of the Lord, and is far from that godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of. There are many who mourn over the consequences of sin, and who undoubtedly wish it had never been accomplished—there are no doubt some who, like Herod, are hurried to the perpetration of a deed of sin from which their better nature would recoil, and who when they awake to a sense of what they have done, would give worlds to recall the deed, though in vain. But all this is not repentance—they are not in themselves contrition and broken-heartedness on account of sin. They are indeed angry with themselves, and see the ruinous and perplexing consequences of their sin as regards their own fortunes and interests, but they are not sorrowing before God, they are not brought to a confession of their deep guiltiness before God; they are not lying low in the dust before a wounded Saviour, or smiting their breasts and saying, "God! be merciful to me a sinner!" It is the Holy Spirit that convinceth of sin, and as it is His blessed office to take of the things of Jesus and shew them unto us, so He takes our sin and shews it unto us in all its aggravated enormity as committed against a pure and holy God, and forces us to cry out with the broken heart of David, "Against Thee only have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight." A wounded spirit is very different from Herod's perplexity and

fear. He had refused to give up his lust for heaven, and God now, in righteous recompence, left him to his terror. There is another valuable lesson I think to be derived from this melancholy detail of guilt, remorse, and ruin, as evidenced in Herod's story; that amid all his guilty fears, and real compunctions and regrets, he never seems to have gone to the root of the matter. He stopped short at the murder of John, but never went back to the adultery that caused the deed. He mourned over the latter sin, but closed his eyes against the former one: and yet how truly does the apostle trace its progress, step by step, from the first germ to the gigantic result: "when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is finished bringeth forth death." I little doubt that Herod, in his after years of exile and destitution, often dated his downfall from the night of that birth-day, when in an unguarded hour he consented to the Baptist's death; and as little do I doubt that he never had the desire, perhaps I should rather say the courage, to retrace his ruin to his own incestuous outrage on his brother's home, and the adultery which polluted his own. That was too dear a sin to be parted with, and therefore he wilfully blinded his eyes, and refused to look too closely, lest he should see too clearly. And I fear it is often the case with ourselves: we have not the courage to examine our hearts minutely. As an embarrassed debtor is afraid to look his difficulties

in the face, and stops short at the last fact, which has brought his affairs to a crisis, and will not look at the previous career of reckless extravagance and profligate expenditure, so the sinner lays hold on some minor delinquency, or as he may call it misfortune, and traces not up his sin to a heart alienated from God, and leading to all those fatal consequences which tread so closely on the heels of the first deviation from a life of purity and holiness.

It is a striking sentence with which Luke concludes his narrative: "he desired to see Jesus." We are indeed told that many prophets and kings desired to see the things which the disciples of Jesus saw. Was this Prince of Galilee among those prophets and righteous men, earnestly longing for one glimpse of that mystery, which even angels desire to look into? Was his the desire of a longing holy heart? The evangelist leaves us in no doubt, for his desire was fulfilled; he did see Jesus. And I cannot but think that there is much significancy in the fact that the same writer, who records the desire, is the only one who gives us the account of its accomplishment. The aged Simeon too desired to see Jesus, and when he saw Him, he said, "Lord, now lettest Thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." Certain Greeks too came to Philip and said, "Sir, we desire to see Jesus, and when Jesus heard it, He said, The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glori-

fied." Thomas desired to see his risen Lord, and when he saw Him, he exclaimed, "My Lord and my God." Herod desired to see Jesus, and when he saw Him, "he and his men of war set Him at nought and mocked Him!" Herod will once more see Jesus, and it will not be then Herod "mocking Jesus," but, saith the Lord, "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have *set at nought* all my counsel, I also will laugh at your calamity, *I will mock* when your fear cometh."

SECTION XL.

(Chapter ix. verse 10—17.)
Matt. xiv. 13—21; Mark vi. 30—44; John vi. 1—13.

As every evangelist in succession records this miracle of creation, the multiplying a few loaves and two fishes into an abundant supply for an immense multitude; it was, no doubt, in their estimation, or rather it was the Spirit's purpose, who indited this incident, that we who read it should find as abundant instruction in it, as these fifties did of earthly food. It was an act of creation:—the same Being, who in the beginning said, "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after his kind, and gave them to man for food and for meat;" and who said to man, "Be fruitful and multiply," now

said to these five loaves, "Be ye multiplied," and there was "bread enough, and to spare." But even in this act of creative power, while it was, as it were, raining down bread from heaven, Jesus condescends to set us a most touching example of what should be our conduct and practice in the habitual reception of our daily food. Before He brake those five loaves or divided those two fishes, He looked up to heaven and blessed them. He recognized His Father as the giver of all good, and in His own power He blessed them. We cannot indeed in our own power bless the food that supplies our tables any more than we can supply the food itself, but the same Father, whom Jesus looked up to in heaven, is our Father also, and it is He who gives us our daily bread—it is He who daily loadeth us with His benefits, even the God of our salvation, and therefore daily should His name be praised, and His blessing sought on our daily meals. I know it is a common practice in this country, and that "a grace," as it is called, is recognized at every Christian's table as a fitting manner wherewith to commence and conclude our meals. We can picture to ourselves that scene in Galilee as the day drew to an end. On the green turf that vast multitude were sitting down by fifties in a company, and Jesus in their midst. How with touching solemnity He raised His eyes to heaven, and with fervent tone pronounced a blessing on the food about to be distributed; and we can ima-

gine with what intense adoration and expectant eagerness that multitude who had all the day followed Him, and listened to His teaching, and many of whom He had that day healed of their diseases, would respond to that fervent blessing which He then pronounced; how from thousand lips and thousand hearts would arise the responsive praise, and the shores and the hills around "repeat the loud amen." Such a grace before a meal, uttered by such lips, or re-echoed by such a throng of guests, was never heard before or since; and I would just remark, what a contrast, nay, what a reproach, to the cold, lifeless, hurried utterance of a few words, and the total indifference and the unseemly posture in which they are listened to—as if he who uttered and they who listened deemed it only an interruption, or at best an awkward deference to custom. I am afraid the reproach applies most where abundance is greatest, and if not omitted altogether, is so slurred over, as to evidence, that as no lip utters amen, so no heart feels thanksgiving and gratitude. It was no unmeaning caution that God gave His people when they should have eaten and were full, to beware lest they should forget the Lord. It is, I fear, too often the case with rational as well as irrational beings, that when they wax fat, like Jeshurun of old, they kick in very wantonness. It is in fact very difficult to realize the great truth which this miracle sets before us, that all we have of our

daily food comes from God. We labour for it, we purchase it, we pay for it, we order it to be prepared for us by others; we never see it raining down from heaven like the manna in the wilderness, nor multiplying before our eyes like these loaves in the hands of Jesus, and we are too apt to forget God in the stores which His love provides. I know we none of us really deny it—we all acknowledge it as an undoubted truth, but we do not feel, we do not practically realize that we are every day living upon another's bounty. It was a very significant enumeration of their blessings and their source which Moses gave to Israel on their approaching entrance into the land of Canaan, "great and goodly cities, *which they builded not*,"—"houses full of all good things, *which they filled not*,"—"wells digged, *which they digged not*,"—"and vineyards and olive trees, *which they planted not*." This might indeed be literally true of ancient Israel, as taking possession of a conquered country; but it is equally true of every possession of man now; and it were well if some secret monitor, like the servant in the court of the Persian monarch, when the heart is slumbering at ease, or waxing fat, or lifted up in pride, could whisper in our ears—

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

I would make one more remark, and it is to ask why we should limit our thanks to one meal, and

that at the close of the day, as if there had been no need for thanksgiving at the preceding. Whenever a family meet at a social table to partake of the bounty supplied by a common Father, there should be the blessing sought, and the praise accorded, whatever the meal, and whatever the hour; and, to my own feelings I acknowledge, the most heartfelt utterance of a grace is when the morning restores the members of the family, and the grateful eye rests on the loved ones around the domestic board, and when the bounty of the Lord renews His daily mercies of daily bread, and one recognizes a promise-keeping God in the assurance, "Bread shall be sure."

SECTION XLI.

(Chapter ix. verse 18—27.)
Matt. xvi. 13—20. Mark viii. 27—38. John vi. 66—71.

It is with no unmeaning purpose that Luke more minutely than the other evangelists records so many instances of our Lord's communings in prayer with His Father in heaven. We had yesterday an instructive instance, while blessing the bread miraculously supplied to the multitude, and we have now another instance of more private yet still social prayer with his disciples. It is the same evangelist who in a later chapter records a parable, which our Lord uttered to teach us that

we ought always to pray, and not to faint, or be weary in so godly a practice, so precious a privilege. And the more entirely we read this Gospel of St. Luke, we shall find how beautifully the Lord's practice accorded with His precept; and that while on earth Jesus was indeed a man of prayer. The subject of His prayer on this occasion is not intimated. From the question that He puts to His disciples at its close as well as the conversation which follows, it would appear that it was probably connected with His mission on earth as the Son of God, and that in His Father's own time the veil might be taken from all hearts, and that His disciples especially who were to go forth on an errand so apparently contradictory as to preach a Saviour rejected of His own nation, and by them crucified and slain, might have an undoubted and resistless conviction that He was indeed "The Christ," "The Anointed One of God;" and Peter in his own name, as well as of all the rest, gives utterance to that noble confession taught him by the Holy Spirit, "Thou art the Christ of God," for "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost."

It is at this moment of apparent triumph, when the Anointed One of God stands before them as the avowed and acknowledged Christ, the promised and predicted Messiah, it is at this very time, when the confession was as yet lingering on the lips of Peter, and the hearts of all were still beat-

ing with rapturous adoration, it is at this moment that Jesus takes the opportunity to speak of His own sufferings and His approaching death of shame and ignominy—and not only of His own, but of theirs also. In what quick succession had the varied emotions and affections of their hearts been wrought upon!—of the deepest solemnity as they joined with their Lord in prayer—of the most exalted and joyous faith as they testified that He was the Christ of God—and now of the most poignant sorrow at the sad tidings of their Master's trials, and perhaps astonishment, mingled it may be with somewhat of incredulity, at their own future lot of suffering and of death.

But are these warnings confined only to those, who listened to them as they fell from the lips of Jesus? Are they not recorded by the Spirit of God for our instruction and guidance? Is it not true of every child of God, who would follow in his Saviour's footsteps and learn of Him, that he too must deny himself, and not merely be ready to forego self-gratification, and self-indulgence; but that there is a cross, aye, and that a daily cross, which every pilgrim has to bear on his earthly road to heaven. A daily cross! what! no cessation, no interruption—no day without it—no day of ease in which the galled shoulder may lay down its burthen, and rest awhile? We cannot say of our Master that He has deceived us as to the nature of the service in which we engage, or

that He has withheld anything to which that service may expose us. It *is* 'a daily cross,' it *is* through *much* tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of heaven, and yet the same word that is true in the trial is alike true in the promise, when He bids us take His yoke upon us, for that His yoke is easy, and His burden light. Nor is there the slightest contradiction, as every child of God knows to his comfort and support. There are no doubt daily fightings, daily thwartings of self, daily struggles with that law in the members warring against the law of the mind, a daily finding that, even in our purest and holiest moments, evil is present with us, and that continually; what we would, that we do not, and what we wish and seek to avoid, yet that we do. And yet "My grace is sufficient for thee:" and "he that endureth to the end shall be saved"—"Be thou faithful unto death," 'resisting even unto blood,' and 'thou shalt have a crown of life.' Even of those who stood around Jesus, and were breathlessly listening to these solemn declarations, there were some who should see with their own eyes such manifestations of divine power, such evidences of Christ's kingdom ruling over all, in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the flocking in of the Gentiles, as should convince them that the confession which Peter had just now made, was no vague nor unmeaning truth, and that though their Master was now speaking of sufferings and death, yet that

"same Jesus should God exalt with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour for to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins." And so the Christian's daily cross, though it be a life-long burthen, will at length be laid down at heaven's gate, as he hears the blessed welcome, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

SECTION XLII.

(Chapter ix. verse 28—36.)
Matt. xvii. 1—13. Mark ix. 2—13.

I MENTIONED last night that we had in this Gospel of St. Luke more frequent notices of our Lord's communings with His father in prayer than in any of the others. We have already had two instances in this very chapter, and now we have a third. It is a striking connection which the evangelist here mentions between prayer and its effects —that, as Jesus prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered. It was on a somewhat similar occasion, after a lengthened and intimate communion with God upon the mount, that the face of Moses shone so that the people of Israel could not look on him for the brightness with which it shone. I do not of course mean to say that prayer produces these effects, or ever did, in itself, produce them; but God in these two instances, vouchsafed these glorious manifestations among other most impor-

tant ends to lead us to reflect on the intimate union that exists between Himself and His praying people. Now prayer carries us, as it were, into the very sanctuary and presence of the Lord that we may catch at least some portion of those rays that shine around His throne.

As I have already said, I do not for a moment suppose that these effects are ever literally and physically visible on the countenance of any saint even in his most fervent and closest communion with his Maker and his Saviour: but this I do believe that if our prayers were more fervent, our confessions more humble, our breathings after holiness more heart-felt, our desires for conformity to God's image more wrestling and intense, though there might not be, and would not be, the brightness that was visible in the Saviour's or in Moses' countenance, yet there would be a holy solemnity, an heavenly tint, an almost radiance of look betokening where the heart had been, and where it had been breathing forth its communings and prayer. It was the very blessing wherewith the Lord charged Aaron to bless His people: "The Lord make His face to shine upon them"—and as in water face answereth to face, so the Lord's lifting up the light of His countenance upon us, will communicate somewhat of its own brightness, and shew, as was remarked of the apostles, that we have indeed been with Jesus. It is a sad contrast to this heavenly mount, which our congregations

too often afford. There may be some resemblance to the three disciples, when they were heavy with sleep; but it is to the close of our services that I would now refer for a few moments, and the conduct evinced by too many among our departing congregations. Do they depart unwillingly, as if longing to linger on and hear more of Jesus, or do they say, as the two disciples said of their conversation with the Lord, on their road to Emmaus, "Did not our hearts burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?" Alas! I often sigh, as I see our retiring congregations, and hear the flippant and the worldly remark of many, even before they have left the sacred precincts,—of the ball room or the hunting-ground, of the milliner or the market. How soon does the world, and its pursuits and its pleasures return into the heart, if indeed they have ever been dislodged. And I often think of old Romaine, who, when he overtook any of his congregation retiring from public worship, and overheard them discussing worldly topics, would step behind them, and, gently pinching their ear, would whisper, "Then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts." No doubt while the disciples on the mount with Jesus were weighed down with sleep, they saw nothing, they heard nothing; and yet how intensely interesting the scene, how absorbing the conversation that was then passing between the glorified Saviour and

these two beatified saints! When Jesus had before spoken of His sufferings and death, they were filled with the deepest sorrow and consternation, and Peter had even ventured to remonstrate on what he deemed so incredible a proceeding: and yet now, while two from out of heaven are discoursing with the Saviour on the same topic, and name too the very spot where He should accomplish His decease, their eyes are heavy with sleep, and their ears are dull of hearing, as if they had no interest in the subject, no sympathy with their Master. Yet the same compassionate Jesus, who afterwards said of the involuntary slumber of the same disciples on another occasion, "The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak," was now very merciful towards them, and as they awaked, permitted them to see His glory, and the men who were talking with Him, even Moses and Elias. He knew indeed what was in them, and that though slumber was on their eyes, love was in their hearts. Alas! how sad a sight must the Lord often see of slumber on the eyes, and no love in the heart!

SECTION XLIII.

(Chapter ix. verse 37—45.)
Matt. xvii. 14—21. Mark ix. 14—29.

It was a touching plea which this poor father urged to Jesus, "he is mine only child." It was

the same sorrow which had so excited the compassion of the Saviour when the only son of the widow of Nain was carried forth to his burying. One loves to dwell on such manifestations of tenderness and sympathy in the Redeemer's character. How completely does it realize the assertion that He is touched with a feeling of *all* our infirmities; that in all our afflictions He is afflicted also; that His ear is ever open, and His heart yearning over all His sorrowing and bereaved ones. It does not in the least degree diminish the reverence with which we adore His Deity: but it invests His human character with a tenderness of which we hardly take in the full extent, till we ourselves need, and seek, and receive His sympathy. We feel that in such trials He is one of like passions with ourselves, though without sin, and that there is no sorrow, nor suffering, nor bereavement, which we cannot take to Him with the fullest confidence that He knows every feeling of our hearts, and will apportion relief exactly as He sees best in every case, in His own time, His own way, and His own measure. "He is mine only child." The widow of Nain made no appeal to the Saviour's compassion—she uttered no audible petition—but, words or no words, He reads the heart, and though the lips may not breathe a syllable of prayer, the heart may be full of prayer; and Jesus returns an answer of mercy alike to the father's earnest cry and the widowed mother's equally ex-

pressive silence. There is something too peculiarly striking in the conduct, one might call it the touching courtesy and condescension of Jesus in both these cases. He recalled the widow's son to life, but not content with that act of power and mercy, He Himself with His own hands leads her restored son, and delivers him to his mother, as if His love could not be satisfied till the mother had once more embraced and held her recovered child within her arms. And here the same scene occurs, Jesus not only rebukes the unclean spirit, and heals the child, but delivers him again to his father. With what feelings would these parents ever afterwards look upon these recovered children as the peculiar gifts of Jesus, received from His hands and consecrated by His love! I do not know what might be the feelings of these youths themselves in after years, whether they rendered unto the Lord according to all the great things He had done for them, or whether "they remembered not His hand, nor the day when He delivered them from the enemy." We may hope indeed and believe that they did "not forget all His benefits," who had "healed their diseases, and redeemed their life from destruction." And yet it is often otherwise; and many, not indeed literally brought back from the grave, but from its very confines, and whose feet have all but stumbled in the dark valley of the shadow of death, have been restored in answer to prayer, and have straightway

forgotten what manner of men they were in that hour of deep peril and need: and many too, in whose future career our Lord's own awful description has been realized, and the evil spirit, for a season ejected, has returned and found all swept and garnished, all ready for his reception, and has returned to his dwelling with other spirits worse than himself, and dwelt there undisturbed and in peace. But I would speak rather of parents, and would ask, is it not true of every parent of every child, that he receives that child at the hand of Jesus, as an especial gift of God, and that when he presents that child at the baptismal font to Jesus, he is, as far as in him lies, consecrating it to the Saviour, enlisting it under the banner of Jesus, and covenanting for it that he shall fight manfully against the world, the flesh, and the devil? The very portion too of the Gospel narrative selected by our Church in her service of baptism, represents Jesus as taking the little children into His arms and blessing them, and bidding those around bring such unto Him; and when by the hands of His ministers He delivers this child into its mother's arms, does He not in effect say, "Nurse this child for Me; it is Mine, I have redeemed it:" and we mutually join in prayer that the child may lead the rest of its life according to this beginning, according to this holy dedication and consecration unto God. In intention, in purpose, nothing can be more beautiful, more appro-

priate, nothing more gracious and merciful; and yet in the result how painfully disappointing! Parents and sponsors alike, in unnumbered instances, are regardless of their own covenant engagements; the child is not nursed for God—the graft itself withers, spiritual life decays, dries up, and it is broken off. The Lord in His merciful provision has intended, and as it were, planned out, that each Christian household should be "a choice enclosure of His own," carefully watched, and prayerfully tilled; but alas! too often "an east wind" from the world blows upon it, and, as heretofore in Egypt, the locusts flock in and eat every herb and all the fruit of the trees, till there remains no verdure, no vestige of the Lord's garden.

SECTION XLIV.

(Chapter ix. verse 46—56.)
Matt. xviii. 1—4. Mark ix. 33—37.

I CAN hardly think that John was influenced on either of these occasions by any other feeling than jealousy for his master's honour, yet even that motive, laudable as it was in itself, led him into sad mistakes, and drew down upon him the severe rebuke of his master. I think too we may trace somewhat of this erroneous judgment to the dispute which the evangelist records as just before occurring among the disciples generally, as to their

future position in their Master's supposed earthly kingdom. It is evident that each one was putting forward his own claims, if not to the exclusion of the rest, at least in superiority over them; and as in the malady of the jaundice, the eye communicates its diseased tint to every object on which it gazes; so John, while upholding his own claims above that of his fellow-disciples, is led to look with an angry and a jealous eye on one, who, though uncommissioned and uncalled, yet acted as a disciple and follower of Christ. It is sad to find even the meek and loving John thus warped by jealousy and influenced by envy. John was, as you know, called the beloved disciple, and was honoured with the peculiar notice and affection of Jesus. One loves to think that the Saviour condescended to feel for John something of human friendship; that with the feelings that would naturally exist between the Master and the disciple there was blended also something of the softer and more engaging ties that bind friend to friend. The Saviour was eminently a man of human sympathies, of human feelings, of human affections, in everything like unto us, sin only excepted; and I cannot but think that in His ineffable condescension, He admitted John into the distinction of being the disciple whom Jesus loved, sanctioned the appellation among his companions, and felt for him that affection which friend feels for friend. Yet even John is rebuked; nay, perhaps because

he was so dear, the rebuke is so severe. In the first instance indeed the error into which the disciple falls is a natural one, and meets not so much with a rebuke as a correction of the mistake into which John had fallen. And alas! how truly may we say, that had this rule of our Lord's been more the rule of Christian communities and churches, how much of acrimony and invective, how much of intolerance and bigotry, of separation and exclusiveness would have been obviated! I have already commented on the lesson to ourselves in the preceding Gospel of St. Mark; but I would just add that not only does Jesus not discountenance this man, but He actually owns him as one of His, claims him as on His side, as acting in His name and for His cause, and with his sanction and authority, though he was not enrolled among His followers, and perhaps in something of a coward spirit stood aloof from His little band. Of all the hindrances of Gospel truth, and snares for timid feet, the Shibboleths of sect or party seem to me the most fatal and soul-corrupting, as well as love-destroying. "He followeth not us," is man's repudiating estimate. "Nay; he is not against us, he is for us," is the Saviour's apportionment of his place and station. And I am persuaded that if we could but agree to forget wherein we differ, and to remember only that in which we all unite, that love which we all hold towards our Lord and Master, and that bond in our common

Head the Lord Jesus Christ, would as effectually unite, as when it was said of old, "See how these Christians love one another." Two of the most violent disputants of the last century, as far at least as their pens were concerned, Toplady and Fletcher of Madely, once met together, and when asked in what they could possibly agree, it was answered that till they knelt down in prayer together, they never knew how strong was the common bond that linked them to Jesus, and as a necessary consequence how much also they loved one another.* And I believe the great secret of a Christian spirit of love and forbearance is to be more instant in prayer both *with* our brother and for our brother. We read of these disciples disputing together, but we do not read of their praying together at this time, or I do not think we should meet with such an instance of an unseemly spirit, as James and John wishing to call down fire from heaven upon the inhabitants of a Samaritan village for their inhospitable and uncourteous reception of their Master as well as themselves. Perhaps all had been rude; it may have been that even the children had taunted them with their Jewish prejudices as they walked through the village seeking hospitality, and repulsed by all. We do not indeed read that it was so, but we do read that these two disciples wished that God's

* It is, I know, a mere feeling, but the above anecdote has always made me place the works of these fierce polemics, but truly Christian men, side by side on my own bookshelves.

fire from heaven should consume all, and were even willing to be the executioners of wrath in commanding the fire to come down. Alas, that the mild, the meek, the affectionate John could have cherished such a thought in his heart, or given utterance to it with his lips! Sectarian prejudice must have been bitter indeed, for though the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, and the Samaritans upheld Gerizim over Jerusalem, yet to call down fire from heaven, to involve a whole community in destruction for what was probably the incivility of a few, was indeed to be of another spirit than that which Jesus had taught them, when He bade them love their enemies, do good to them that persecuted them, and pray for such as should despitefully use them. The disciples indeed quoted their Scriptures to justify their appeal; but alas, men know not of what spirit they are, if they search their Bible for texts and maxims to justify them in what is wrong, and thus wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction. It was, after all, but an insult, and provocation, and an inhospitable repulse on the part of those who certainly had no reason to love or regard a Jew. And our Saviour's conduct on this occasion is not only an exemplification of His own rule, "when they persecute you in one city, flee ye to another;" but it is a valuable lesson to ourselves not to allow even the real injuries and wrongs of life, far less the petty insults and provocations of the day, to disturb our Christian temper, or warp

our Christian love. One is glad to find that at no very distant day John had a far different spirit, and was himself a preacher of the Gospel in the villages of Samaria, and probably in this very one on which he would now have called down fire from heaven. Acts viii. 14.

SECTION XLV.

(Chapter ix. verse 57 to the end.)

We have here three different characters professing to be desirous of following Christ. It would be a painful discovery if we could, with equal accuracy, ascertain the various feelings that, even at the present day, bring persons to Christ, and we might add, the various motives that prevent people, after they have come, from thoroughly closing with Christ. It would be perhaps a saddening surprise to many, if we could go through one of our congregations with a mirror in our hands, that reflected on its faithful surface every feeling of every heart. The majority might indeed be Gallios, "caring for none of these things;" some might be like Festus, deriding and crying down the preacher; some like Agrippa, for the moment touched, and almost persuaded to cast in their lots with us, and be Christians in deed as well as name; and here and there one, whose hearts, like Lydia's, the Lord has opened to attend to the things spoken. Of the

three here brought under our notice there can be no doubt that the first was most insincere in his professions; that he thought Jesus now on His progress to Jerusalem to assume a throne, and that he had better be early in the field to secure to himself the riches and distinctions which he thought would be so abundantly showered on the followers of Jesus. His profession indeed is a comprehensive one, "I will follow Thee, whithersoever Thou goest." Profession in fact is very cheap, and costs little or nothing at the moment of making, though there can be no doubt that when this wretched man has to give account of every idle word he spoke on earth, these few words, "I will follow Thee, whithersoever thou goest," will meet him most reproachfully, and he would give thousands of worlds, if he had them, that he had indeed followed Jesus. Jesus, however, weighed his words, even while he uttered them, in the balance of the sanctuary—and they were found wanting—and simply meant, "I will follow Thee, if Thou hast wealth to scatter, or honours to bestow; I will follow Thee, whithersoever thou goest, if every step of Thy path be strewed with ease and abundance." One can have no doubt, from the tenour of our Lord's reply, that there was not even a germ of sincerity in his protestation of love, and that Jesus might have said to him, as He did to some others, "Ye seek me because of the loaves." It is sad to follow Jesus in a covetous spirit,

to assume a religious name and character for worldly purposes and temporary interests. There was one already among that little band whose heart was not right with God; who, though a professed follower and called apostle, had neither part nor lot in the matter. I would not, however, wrong even this man by classing him with Judas, for there can be but little doubt that when he heard the terms of discipleship, how meagre in all he coveted, and how abundant in that he coveted not, he went back and walked no more with Jesus. "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." And was this, blessed Jesus, Thy lot on earth? Was it indeed true of Thee, that the very beasts of the earth and birds of the air had homes, whilst Thou hadst none? Was it for this deep poverty and destitution on earth that Thou didst leave the riches of Thy Father's house, and the love of Thy Father's bosom? No doubt, in one sense, the assertion was literally true,—Jesus had no home of his own: He chose to be dependent on the ministering of others to His wants, though we have seen with what facility He could have ministered to every need, whether in food or money. Yet He never wrought a miracle for Himself, but permitted others to minister unto Him of their substance, and out of their abundance supply His need. No attractive prospect for the covetous and ambitious

worldling, so ready to follow Him whithersoever He went; and accordingly we hear no more of him. With regard to the other two, there seems at first something that grates upon our feelings, as if the loving Saviour with unkindly harshness repulsed and checked the tenderest affections of the human heart, and sanctioned the unnatural rending of the holiest ties, even in the very hour and under the very circumstances that would call forth their truest and purest exercise. It is not however in reality so,—we feel that He who, in His dying hour, provided for His own widowed parent, could have sanctioned no evasion of filial love and reverence,—we know that His Gospel rends no tie, inculcates no disregard of natural affection, but places all on a broader and a surer foundation than even nature's claims, or nature's instinct. But Jesus had evidently *called* these to follow Him,—the words of their answers imply as much,—and He well knew and had predicted how much of opposition, in those days especially, a man would find at home; that the father should be against the son, and the mother against the daughter, and that a man's worst foes should be they of his own household. Many a Jewish father, I fear, would have imprecated a curse on a son's head had he gone home and told him that he meant henceforth to cast in his lot with the despised Jesus of Nazareth. It was therefore in mercy, not in unkindness—in love, not in harsh-

ness—that Jesus would not expose these young converts to the peril and sorrow of such a conflict. And even at the present day, I fear, were a Jewish youth to tell his father and his mother that he was come to bid them farewell to follow Jesus, he would find the most embittered opposition and reviling from those of his own household. It is however a valuable lesson to ourselves that we suffer not any human ties, any human affections to interfere with the paramount claims of God and Jesus. "Whoso loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me." With ourselves it may not be so much opposition as rivalry. We erect idols of our own which we think we do well to love to the exclusion of every other love; and though the idolater himself might, if his idol were taken away, like Micah, exclaim in bitterness against God, "Ye have taken away my gods which I made;" yet we can at once see how much of tenderness and love there would be in dethroning that idol, or removing, or forbidding, that attachment, which would keep out God from the heart.

SECTION XLVI.

(Chapter x. verse 1—16.)
Matt. xi. 20—24.

THIS commission to the seventy disciples is different from that which was shortly before given to

the apostles. St. Luke mentions both, but touches very briefly on the mission of the twelve, which Matthew, who was one of them, gives at considerable length, while Luke equally enlarges on this to the seventy, and it may be for the same reason, that he was one of the seventy. I have before said that I think we can trace more than one instance in this Gospel which seems to evidence that it was in all probability written by an eye-witness of many of the scenes which it records, and if so, Luke himself was in all probability one of the seventy whom our Lord here sends out before His face on this important mission, and on which the writer seems to linger with all the affectionate remembrance of one who is recording scenes in which he himself took a part. There is something very touching in the circumstance mentioned by Luke, that Jesus sent them out by two and two, as if He would not that a missionary should work alone; that there should be brother joined to brother, and labourer to labourer, to share in toil, to counsel in difficulty, and console in sorrow and disappointment. How the Lord condescends to the very infirmities and weaknesses of our nature, and of the natural cravings of those whom He employs! It was the same love which in the beginning said, "It is not good that the man should be alone." He knows whereof we are made, and remembereth that we are but dust, and He is therefore anxious that man should not

bear "the burden and heat of the day" alone. He bids them too depart with prayer—prayer that the harvest already ripening might not be lost for want of labourers to gather it in. But can we think that Jesus at that moment looked alone to the scanty and limited harvest then ripening in Judæa and Galilee; that in the very hour when He was warning them that there were cities which would not receive them, and against which they were to shake off the very dust of their feet as a testimony; at the very moment when He was mourning over the doom of heedless Chorazin, of impenitent Bethsaida and unbelieving Capernaum, when He knew that in a few more years Jerusalem herself would be ploughed out, and not one stone left upon another of her temple or her walls, and that Judæa should be trodden down of the Gentiles;—can we, I say, think that His glance was bounded only by the horizon of that narrow land He was then treading when he said, "The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few?" We cannot doubt that His all-seeing eye was then piercing far beyond the narrow limits of time and space; that the future was before Him in all its generations and ages till the end of time, and that the whole globe, and all its countless tribes and families in their successive ages, were then passing in array before Him; that amidst *them*, and over *their* fair and fertile districts, there would be an abundant harvest to be gathered, though so few to

labour. There is something very touching in the reflection, that the compassionate Jesus was even then loving and praying for us and for our land. His own feet were indeed treading on the shores of the sea of Galilee, and His eye resting on her rich plains and hills; yet I cannot doubt that at that moment Jesus, with prescient eye, saw, with many another noble stream, the rivers of our own land—the Thames, the Tay, and the Shannon, not as then, rolling through swamp and jungle, with no other sounds but the roar of their own waters, but as they are now—freighted with commerce, and bearing to still more distant climes the message of Christian interest and love. It was for these then, the most distant and remote, as well as those of Galilee, that Jesus Himself at this time prayed and directed His disciples also to pray, that as seed time and harvest would never fail, so the spiritual seed-time and the spiritual harvest would never fail, and might be abundantly supplied with labourers both to sow and to reap. It is a touching prayer, and one which we especially need to learn and use. Alas! how much of the harvest has been apparently lost! how many a darkened land and benighted district has never heard of a Saviour! how many a soil that might have repaid the labours of the husbandman, and grown wheat for God's garner, has been left untilled for want of labourers! Do we ever reflect that Jesus, who thus prayed so earnestly and

interceded so successfully for ourselves, has left us, with an especial significance of meaning, a missionary petition for our daily prayer, to remind us that ere we ask daily bread for ourselves, or even forgiveness for our sins, we should call to mind our brethren elsewhere, and pray that Christ's kingdom may be established among them with as saving mercy as it has been in our own land. "Thy kingdom come" not only reminds us of our own debt of gratitude to God, but of what we owe to those whose souls are perishing for lack of labourers.

SECTION XLVII.

(Chapter x. verse 17—24.)

We have a striking instance in this return of the disciples, how far more abundantly the Lord supplies every need, than we can either desire or expect, or indeed than He Himself promises. When He sent forth these His messengers without the usual provisions for their journey, He had in fact engaged for their support by declaring that "the labourer was worthy of his hire," and so they had no doubt found it. They had, too, a general commission given to them to heal the sick, and on their return they joyously announce how abundantly, beyond their expectations, this promise had been fulfilled, for that even the very devils themselves had been subject unto them,

through and in the name of Jesus. It was in His name and power they had gone forth; in His name they had preached and done these marvellous works; and now, on their return, they gratefully ascribe all and everything to the name of their beloved Master. "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise and the glory ascribed," is the acknowledgment of every saint on earth, and will be "the joyous theme of every redeemed one in heaven."

It had been our Lord's promise, that "whosoever hath to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance;" and He now proceeds to realize this promise to these disciples by that gracious declaration of their coming forth unscathed and unhurt from the contest they were to wage with the powers of darkness; that they should be victorious over every foe, and that no weapon forged against them should prosper; that nothing should ever pluck them out of His or His Father's hands, and that nothing should by any means or in any wise hurt them. Oh! what precious immunity from danger is here! Could even the Saviour's love go beyond this? Are there treasures in His Father's house that can exceed this? Are there promises more abundant, privileges more precious than these? Yes! there is a source of far purer joy, of far holier thanksgiving, of far more rapturous praise—that their names were written in heaven. Their conflicts with Satan, though finally

triumphant, would be full of peril and suffering; they would many a time faint by the way and be dispirited, perhaps even at times sore wounded themselves, and ready to perish, and for a time discomfited; and their warfare, though ending in victory, would be one of sore trial and painful endurance, and at every step in every stage would practically convince them how utterly incapable in themselves to resist or to conquer. And yet their names were written in heaven!—not for any works or deservings of their own, but from the sovereign grace and electing love of God from all eternity. Oh! what a wonderful idea of the love of God in Jesus does this declaration give us, that in heaven's register are recorded the names of all God's children; that the Saviour has there sealed, as it were, each name with His own blood, and with His own hand written it down, and entered it among the heirlooms of His inheritance, the gems of His treasury and the jewels of His crown. It is an important enquiry to each one of us, "Is my name written in heaven?" can I read there "my title to the skies?" I know those who would shrink with horror from such an assertion as the most daring presumption, and yet assuredly the greater horror would be to think otherwise; nor can I see presumption in taking God at His word. I do not say that you are privileged to have access to that book of God's record called the "book of life," and that with

your own hands you can open its sealed pages, and with your own mortal eyes see your name entered there. That book is not to be opened till "the dead, small and great, shall stand before God;" but there is another book which we may examine even here, and that is the book of conscience. I know that book, if fairly read, would testify to much that would be against us, many a debtor-account of heavy reckoning against our names, which we have no means of our own to pay; but do we see the blood-red line that cancels all drawn through every item? does the Spirit of God testify with our spirits that we are the children of God, hating and resisting sin, and doing all in the name of the Lord Jesus? But alas! the book of conscience alone could never speak peace, could never give assurance; and therefore it is, that there is many a stricken one of the Lord's family who goeth heavily by reason of indwelling sin; many a mourning one "that walketh in darkness and seeth no light;" many a one that, because they cannot read distinctly, think their names altogether left out of the book of life. And therefore it is that in His love God has given us another book, and promised moreover a light to read it by, a lamp that shall cast its own bright ray on every promise and every precept, so that the very "deaf shall hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness;" "they also that erred in

spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured learn doctrine." I do not say that every promise in the Bible is equally brilliant to our finite sight, any more than all the stars in the firmament are alike in brilliance. "One star differeth from another star in glory;" and, amid them and above them all, shines some evening star conspicuous in purity and lustre. And yet could our eyes pierce infinity of space, we should find the most distant and the least as full of light as the brightest and the clearest. So it is with God's word: every promise "cometh down from the Father of lights," and is itself light and truth; but some shine more prominently than others, with not a cloud to dim; and, no doubt too, each gazer into that star-lit heaven of revealed truth finds some peculiar text that sweetly approves itself to his heart's best affections. Yet there is a morning and an evening star of purest lustre, which must attract every eye, and assure every heart, "The blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin," and "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."

SECTION XLVIII.

(Chapter x. verse 25—29.)

THE question which this lawyer put to our Lord, was a most important one—the most im-

portant which man can possibly ask: "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" It is a question which we should each one put to our own souls; it should be the great object of all our efforts, all our enquiries, and all our prayers, that "we may so pass through things temporal, as not finally to lose the things that are eternal." The question then, which this lawyer put to Jesus, was a very proper one in itself, but not so the spirit in which he put it—that was most sinful, for it was from no desire to have his doubts satisfied, from no wish to learn "the way, the truth and the life," from no longing for that eternal life about which he enquired. It is here said that he asked the question in order to tempt Jesus, and though heaven was on his lips, there was little of heavenly love in his heart. I do not think that any of us are likely to ask such a question by way of laying a snare for another; though there is often an unkind and unamiable propensity to lay a trap to bring another into ridicule, and expose a brother or a sister, especially a weaker-minded one, to the jest of those around. I have called it unamiable, but it is in reality worse, for it is unbrotherly, unsisterly, and above all unchristian, to find pleasure in giving pain to others, or extract amusement from the exposure of other's faults and follies. There is too another propensity of our nature, far more in the spirit of this scribe, to tempt others to reply that their answer may draw on a discus-

sion, not to elicit truth, but to exhibit display and cleverness. It is a sad perversion of talent to seek to make religious discussion, if not a snare to others, at least a snare to our own souls; and in these days especially, when men are so ready to split straws, I would caution you, not against religious conversation, but against religious controversy. Anything which promotes love, which encreases charity, or which exhibits and fixes Jesus more prominently in our heart's affections, may be wisely sought: anything which embitters love and charity, which widens difference, provokes an angry answer, and leads you to part in a less kindly spirit than you met, had better be avoided.

The question however of this Scribe is, as I have said, a most important one, 'What shall I do to inherit eternal life?' It is the same question as was asked by the rich young man, who came running to Jesus, and kneeling down before Him said "Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" And it was the same question which the gaoler at Philippi put to Paul on that memorable night, when he sprang into the dungeon where Paul and Silas were in the stocks, and cried out "Sirs! what must I do to be saved?" And it is the question which many a terrified sinner cries out on his death-bed. All the three asked, you see, the same question—the lawyer, the young man and the gaoler—and yet, as far as we know, only one out of the three got to

heaven, and that one, the least likely of the three in human estimation. This lawyer had evidently another object in view than finding his way to heaven. Perhaps he thought he knew it well enough—perhaps he thought that, as a child of Abraham, and an expounder of the law, he was in no danger of missing it, and that as it was his business to point it out to others, he must of necessity be walking in it himself. And yet you see to get to heaven is far more than merely asking the way thither; it is something far otherwise than relying on mere outward privileges, or even exhibiting and actually feeling a strong desire after heavenly things, as the young man really did. In the present case our Lord answered the lawyer nearly in the same manner as He did the young man, and His motive was alike in both instances, to shew the utter insufficiency of that reliance, which they felt on their supposed observance of the law. In reply therefore to the question Jesus answers by referring him to the Law, "How readest thou?" The man answers very correctly, and shews himself well read in Scripture: and, alas! it is quite possible to have a very good and correct knowledge of our Bible, and yet have no experimental nor saving knowledge of its truths. We may be fluent enough in quoting texts of Scripture, but very dull and ignorant in applying them to ourselves; and so it was with this lawyer, he rapidly and fluently ran

through the first great commandment of the law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind—and thy neighbour as thyself;" and never thought for a moment how much at variance with that law his own practice was—how little of love, and how much of hatred and enmity there was in his heart. It was therefore with peculiar point that our Lord said, "Thou hast answered right; this do, and thou shalt live." Jesus had said once before, "Happy are ye"—not, if you know—but—"happy are ye if ye do these things." It is not knowing our duty, but doing our duty, that will gain the approval of God. "The Gospel professed may lift a man *unto* heaven—but it is only the Gospel possessed that brings a man *into* heaven." It is not every one, who *looks* like a Christian, that *lives* like one: and St. Paul speaks of those, who made their boast of the law, and yet dishonoured God through breaking that very law of which they boasted.

SECTION XLIX.

(Chapter x. verse 30—37.)

THIS parable of the wounded traveller, or as it is more generally called, the parable of the good Samaritan, is in its literal circumstances most

touching. The incidents are all such as deeply interest our feelings, and enlist our sympathies: and though it is called a parable, it is far from improbable that its scenes did actually occur, or might assuredly have occurred any day in that dangerous road to Jericho, so frequented by thieves and robbers, and so often the scene of outrage and murder as to have acquired the name of "the Bloody Way." In whatever country however, or on whatever spot such a sight had presented itself of a fellow-creature lying naked, and wounded, and bleeding, and nigh unto death on the road-side, few I think would have hesitated to stop and see what help they could afford to a dying creature, even though at the risk of their own safety. Our Lord represents three travellers in succession coming to the spot where the wounded man lay. A priest—a minister of religion—was the first who drew nigh. One, naturally perhaps, expects more humanity, more tenderness, more self-denial in one who is a servant of a God of love and mercy: but this priest at least had none, and shewed none. He thought probably of his own danger and his own similar fate, if he tarried to look on the helpless sufferer; so as soon as he caught a glimpse of him, he turned from the path, and passed by on the other side. There was no human eye to notice his inhumanity and unkindness, but surely a servant of God should have remembered "Thou, God, seest me." When he reached home unplundered

and unwounded, he might deem himself fortunate to have escaped the fate of the poor wretch he had left by the road-side to perish: but surely an Israelite, who remembered his own origin, how God had passed by him, and saw him polluted in his own blood, and had said unto him, when he was in his blood, 'Live,' yea had said unto him when he was in his blood, 'Live'—should have done to his countryman as God had done unto him. The next traveller along the road was a Levite, who, though not a priest, yet ministered about holy things and was equally a servant of God with him who had just passed on. And he, I should say, was the more hard-hearted and cruel of the two—the priest caught but a passing glance of the wounded traveller, perhaps instantly turned away his eyes, and saw not, though he might guess at the extremity of the case—but this Levite came to the very spot, gazed on the bleeding senseless man, heard his groans, and yet after all passed by on the other side, and left his countryman to die. I read indeed the other day, I think in the *Edinburgh Review*, how the writer imagined this Levite to have been a man of peculiar sensitiveness, that his nerves were too highly wrought, and that he turned aside "in shrinking sensibility, and in sheer despair of doing any good." I confess I have no sympathy with that humanity, which, however it may clothe itself in a high-sounding name, is always wanting in the hour of need, and one can-

not help looking with suspicion on that 'sensibility' which always shrinks from trouble, and is too cautious to risk its own safety. One can hardly help carrying the reviewer's picture a little further, and imagining how this *sensitive* Levite, amid the comfort and security of his own home, and perhaps too at his own festive board, would tell with touching pathos the narrative of the traveller on the Bloody Way whom he had left to perish; and, as he told it, be looked upon as a man of fine nerves, and delicate humanity. And now a third traveller approaches—and he no sooner saw the pitiable object than his compassion at once moved him to every effort for his relief. He went to him at once, bound up his wounds, taking of his own garments for the purpose, pouring in oil and wine, the very provision he had made for his own necessities, and placing the wounded man on his own beast walked by his side, heedless of the delay or the additional risk he ran in tarrying on so dangerous a road—but, as though he had been a brother, tenderly supporting him till he had brought him in safety to an inn, and there provided for his future comfort and support. It adds of course immeasurably to the contrast of these three travellers' conduct, that the two first were countrymen of the wounded man, and the last one of a people with whom the Jews had not only no dealings, but were irreconcileably at variance. It was a Jewish maxim, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate

thine enemy," and had the wounded traveller been a Samaritan instead of a Jew, one might perhaps have not so much wondered at their inhumanity; for I think the inference our Lord suggests is, that deserting as they did a countryman, they would without scruple have left an enemy and a Samaritan to perish. The parable you know was uttered in answer to the lawyer's question, "And who is my neighbour?" and there can be no doubt that our Lord's primary and perhaps sole motive was to declare to us that Gospel-truth, which Judaism had never practised, and Heathenism had never known, that every fellow-creature is our neighbour and our brother—that wherever suffering or want or distress exists, it has a claim upon our sympathy; and that Christian love never stops to ask of what creed or sect or clime or color the sufferer is. He is a fellow-creature, and in want—and therefore he is our neighbour, and as he needs, so should he have our ready and instant aid.

SECTION L.

(Chapter x. verse 38 to the end.)

THE two sisters here introduced to us were members of that family at Bethany, whose brother Lazarus Jesus afterwards raised from the dead. We meet with them often in the course of

the Gospel narrative, and there can be no doubt that the Saviour looked upon them with peculiar affection and esteem, and that they in return felt for the Lord the most heartfelt attachment and reverence. There are many evidences in Scripture that Jesus, while sojourning on earth, really felt as man; that the various emotions of human nature, as well as its sufferings, were familiar to Him; but nowhere do I think this so touchingly and interestingly put before us, as when He condescended to feel for this family the affection of an equal, and to "love Martha and Mary and their brother Lazarus." And yet in the passage before us, how sweetly and strikingly is the character and errand of the Saviour blended with the intimacy of the friend. "Faithful indeed are the wounds of a friend," and of such a friend as Jesus. In the course of one of His journeys, His steps direct Him to the village where this family resided; and Martha eager to shew her respect for Jesus receives Him and His train into her house. But wherever Jesus went He had His Father's work to do; and no sooner had He entered the house, than He began to talk of the things pertaining to the kingdom of heaven, while the affectionate and loving Mary sat at His feet listening with eager interest to every word that fell from His lips. Her whole soul appears to have been enchained by His words, and every surrounding object—her sister—the entertainment preparing for Jesus—the

bustle of attendants, or the flocking in of other guests—all were forgotten in the absorbing interest of the themes on which Jesus was speaking. Our Lord was by no means one who rigidly kept aloof from human entertainments, as if they were unseemly and unsuited to a life of piety. We find Him on many occasions accepting invitations to eat meat with those who sought the honour of His presence. To use His own words, He came "eating and drinking," that is, He condescended to all the innocent enjoyments of human intercourse and society. But it is important to remark that on no one occasion did He omit to make the entertainment a channel of instruction to the guests. He never forgot the errand on which He came, and ever sought to make His visit a blessing and a means of grace to the household which received Him under its roof. I do not say that every guest at an entertainment can do as Jesus did, or that the usages of society admit of those modes of instruction and edification which the Saviour adopted. But I still think we might learn a valuable lesson from His practice, and society would be indeed a gainer, if less of frivolity, and more of serious, if not religious, matter were the prevailing topics of discourse. Such a practice would no doubt find many objectors—even good and pious people might be found to think it unseasonable, inconsistent, and in the way, and perhaps even degrading to religion. It was so even in this house at Bethany,

where Jesus was the guest, and Jesus was the speaker; and even Martha, of whose piety and faith, and love to Jesus there could not be the slightest doubt, remonstrated with Jesus on its interruption and hindrance to her domestic arrangements, "Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me." Her desire to honour Jesus was no reproach to Martha; but to make it the paramount object of His coming under her roof was wrong, and to be so cumbered with these comparatively petty cares as to neglect more essential and more abiding objects, well deserved the mild, yet affectionate rebuke of Jesus. There was a petulance too in her tone and words, as if her temper was ruffled by this unnecessary anxiety about her entertainment and its appearance. She does not even speak to her sister, or request her aid, but almost uncourteously and rudely charges her guest with what she deemed an interference, or at least an unseasonable interruption. How gentle, how even affectionate the reply of Jesus! recalling her by a few simple but expressive words to a sense of her own momentary forgetfulness of higher objects in her overcareful thought of what they should eat, and what they should drink; and Mary's wiser choice in seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. The entertainment passed away, like many similar scenes of vanity and cumbrous grandeur. There had been

turmoil and confusion in preparation with somewhat of an angry and a hasty spirit—dissatisfaction in its progress—and no doubt regret and disappointment at its close. But the words of Jesus remained—they had no doubt fallen on a kindly soil; and Martha had indeed reason to feel how "faithful are the wounds of a friend."

SECTION LI.

(Chapter xi. verse 1—4.)

THIS prayer, so well known to us as the Lord's Prayer, and so called as the prayer which He taught His disciples; not as the prayer which He Himself used, for He could never have adopted the fifth petition, is so familiar to us, that it seems almost unnecessary to offer a single word in explanation of it. And yet its very familiarity, and the frequency with which it is used in our public, social and even private worship, has perhaps tended to render us, I will not say indifferent, but at least thoughtless of its most extended meaning and most comprehensive form. It is not beyond the truth to say, that there is not a form of prayer extant which contains so much within so brief a compass, or which so thoroughly embodies all which sinful necessitous man can require. I would however make one previous remark on the circumstance

which called forth this form of prayer from Jesus; it was at the request of his disciples, "Lord! teach us to pray." It was in itself a most necessary petition, for we know neither what nor how to ask; nay, it is a melancholy fact that if left to himself the natural man would never pray; and though in a Christian country and with Christian education there are few who have not been taught in some sense to use the words of prayer, and even of this prayer, yet it is only by the teaching of the Lord Jesus and by His Holy Spirit that we can ever pray aright. Man is naturally a stranger to God and himself—he knows nothing of God's purity and holiness—he knows nothing of his own sinfulness and corruption. Man too is naturally "enmity against God," and desires not the knowledge of His ways: and when in some degree awakened to a sight and sense of the vast gulf that separates a sinner from his Judge, his first impression is, with Adam to hide himself, or with Peter to cry out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." I do not mean to say that a natural man has no cravings, no wants, which may not lead to something like prayer. The starving man will ask for food, the man perishing with thirst will crave though but a drop of water; the sick will crave health, and he whose frame is racked with pain will seek relief from suffering; but these are rather the instincts of nature than the desires of the heart; and as the natural man has, and can have,

no knowledge of spiritual wants, no sense of sin, and of his need of forgiveness, no desire after holiness; it is only the renewed heart that can in reality pray. How comforting then to have a form or pattern of prayer, not of our own confused, and dimmed, and bewildered fears, and desires, and hopes, but a prayer formed expressly for man's use by Him who knoweth whereof we are made, and who has so significantly shewn that He remembereth that we are but dust and ashes, by teaching and empowering us, even though sinners, to come unto God in the character of His dear children, and to cry unto Him, "Abba, Father." Under how many characters do we present ourselves to God in this prayer! Every phase and condition of man is successively brought forward; but still, first and foremost, is that of children. The portal by which we enter is love—a Father's love: it is at our Father's door we are knocking, and in the spirit and almost the words of the prodigal, the first word of our lips is, "Father." It is true we go on to acknowledge ourselves as in every way dependent on Him, as subjects, as servants, as beggars, as sinners; but there is still the tender appellation of Father lingering on our lips and in our hearts; and we feel a Father will not repulse even an erring child, to whom He has not only opened the door, but taught the very words in which to pour out his loving heart with most acceptance. Of the six petitions of which the

prayer is composed, our own reason, as well as the analogy of Scripture, assents to the reverential precedence of the three first. In the Old Testament, under the Mosaic covenant, the first Table of the Law is exclusively designed for the glory of God, His exclusive worship, the hallowing of His name, the setting up of His kingdom, and the observance of His day; so in these first petitions, the same objects are either specially or virtually the first brought forward. They are the very petitions which would naturally be dearest to a child's heart, a subject's loyalty, and a servant's fidelity and obedience. Then follows the petition for our own daily wants, so beautifully in accordance with our Lord's own precept, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you," that one feels at once how appropriate, how relying on the promises of God, is that one single solitary petition for daily bread, just sufficient to remind our Father of His child's needs, and yet not prescribing either measure, or mode, or indeed time, except so far as to ask every day for every day's provision. With regard to the next petition, I think we, some of us, mistake its purport, as if in it we claimed the forgiveness of our own sins as in some degree in recompence of our forgiveness of those who have sinned against us. I do not imagine that any use these words as prescribing to God the measure and extent of His forgiveness of us by our measure of forgiveness

of others. We feel at once how immeasurably scanty our forgiveness must ever be with the freeness of His—how slow and tardy—how still remembering the wrong, though forgiving the injury. I think our Lord meant to impress upon our hearts, that, as we love not first, but must love, *because* we are loved, so we should forgive our brother, *because* we are ourselves forgiven of God. I would say of the whole prayer, it is especially the prayer of a child of God, and though many who are not of God's family use its form, there is not one petition of the whole six but what must essentially emanate from a renewed and gracious heart.

SECTION LII.

(Chapter xi. verse 5—13.)

THIS portion of Scripture confirms the oft-repeated truth, that God gives more abundantly than we ask or desire of Him. The disciples had asked to be taught a form of prayer, and Jesus not only condescends to their request by bequeathing to them and to His Church that form of words, which we call the Lord's prayer, but He goes on to encourage them to perseverance and earnestness and even importunity in prayer, and appeals to their natural reasons and affections for arguments to prove that that Father in heaven, to whom He

taught them to direct their prayer, will ever hear and answer His children's cry. He instructs them not to be deterred from going to "Our Father," either for our own necessities or those of others, by the supposition that our prayers can ever be unseasonable. A man indeed may go to an earthly friend at unfitting or unseasonable hours, when his ear is heavy, and his eyes are closed in sleep—or an earthly potentate's guards may not dare to awaken a tyrant from his slumber, though fellow-creatures are perishing every moment, whom that tyrant's order could at once release*—a man may go when an earthly friend is disinclined from temper or caprice to listen to his appeal—he may go when that friend is away from home and far out of his reach—or he may go and find that friend unable, even though willing, to assist or relieve his wants. A thousand circumstances may thwart and hinder a request made to a being like ourselves. Nothing could apparently be more out of place or season than the request here imagined by our Lord, of a man's going to his neighbour's house at midnight, when himself and his whole family had long retired to rest, and asking food to set before an accidental traveller. The illustration indeed may not have appeared so uncommon to

* Vide "*Holwell's Narrative*" *of his Sufferings in the 'Black Hole' at Calcutta.*

"Unhappy men!" said the Jemetdar, "submit to necessity. The Soubahdar is asleep, and what slave dares disturb his repose?"

those to whom it was addressed as it does to us; for in those countries travellers not unfrequently selected the cool of the evening and the night for their journies; but our Lord evidently means to represent the application as unseasonable, and rejected because it was unseasonable; and yet unseasonable as it was, and refused at first because it was so, it is afterwards yielded to the man's importunity. "I cannot rise and give thee," is the first answer; and yet afterwards on the reiterated importunity of his friend he ariseth and giveth as many as are needed. And remember this man was not begging for himself, he was interceding in behalf of another's wants—of one in whom he felt a lively interest—a friend in his need. Had he been begging for himself I do not know that he could have pleaded more earnestly, certainly not more successfully; and it is a great encouragement to be earnest in intercessory prayer for the welfare and good of others. Our Father in heaven bids us come at all times, in all seasons, midnight or noon-day. Midnight indeed was especially one of David's sweetest hours of prayer; it was his resolution, nay, his usual custom, to arise at midnight, in order to give thanks. It was too at the midnight hour that Paul and Silas in their dungeon were singing praises to God. But neither David, nor Paul, nor Silas ever received for answer, "Trouble me not: I cannot rise and give thee." Heaven's doors and the Lord's ears are alike ever open to the prayers of His people.

However, a friend pleading for a friend and with a friend is but a poor image of the Lord's readiness to hear and grant. This man was refused though a friend, nay, the friendship existing between them is expressly said to have had no influence in the concession afterwards made—it was solely by reason of his importunity that he succeeded in wearying out and as it were extorting his request. So our Lord goes on to add the still tenderer image, the far more apt illustration of a father's love to his child, and a father's ready answer to his child's cry; and yet even that, earnest and intense as it often is, comes not up to the measure of God's love to His children. We know, for instance, that parents are very liable to err in their estimate of what is good for their children; that in their earnestness for time they forget eternity. But it is from no lack of affection; and no parent would consciously substitute a stone for bread, or poison for food, though in reality something very like such a mistake is often made. But there is no error in God's love, "no variableness, no shadow of turning," no blindness, no limited or bounded views. He loves with an unerring, as with an everlasting love, and He never leaves nor forsakes. Nor is it any common gift He proffers, that perishes in the using or leaves disappointment behind; it is His best gift, that gift that seals all others, "He will give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him."

SECTION LIII.

(Chapter xi. verse 14—23.)
Matt. xii. 22—45. Mark iii. 22—30.

If a minister of the present day knew as accurately, and minutely the opinions felt and expressed respecting his own ministry, he would perhaps find them as various, and some as unkind as those here mentioned respecting the work of Jesus: "If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more they of His household." Some few wondered—some perhaps were struck with conviction at the power He manifested, some ascribed His act to collusion with the evil one—and some doubted altogether and demanded in scorn fresh evidences and signs of His mission. It is, I think, much mercy to ourselves, whether ministers or others, that in a general way we are for the most part ignorant of what is said of us, and as regards a minister, I would say that he would not only be most unwise and inconsiderate, but I think also sinfully trangressing his appointed bound, who should attempt to ascertain the opinion entertained of himself or his ministry. He will not fail to hear much that must pain and grieve him, if of a sensitive mind, and somewhat also it may be that cannot fail to injure him, if he be of a vain one. Censure and praise are alike prejudicial, but the latter most especially so. The ministry of our

blessed Lord, as we see in this portion of the chapter, was much maligned; that of His apostle Paul was equally so, and his enemies went so low as to animadvert even on his bodily infirmities. Yet Paul's rule was a good one, for he declared that as for himself it was a small matter that he should be judged of man's judgment; nay, he did not presume, nor dare, to sit in judgment on himself; but simply and fervently, in all singleness of heart, desiring to do his work as unto the Lord and not unto men: he too, like his Master, committed himself unto Him that judgeth righteously.

And yet on this occasion Jesus thought it not derogatory to justify Himself, and defend the miracle He had just performed from the gross imputation with which His opponents had charged Him, that the power to cast out devils was given Him by Satan himself. And He shews how utterly ruinous such an act on Satan's part must be to the extension of his kingdom and power on earth. Satan's aim is, and ever has been, to rule over the souls and bodies of men—to keep them in bondage to himself, and in no one instance, if he can help it, to loosen his hold over any miserable victim, till he is finally delivered over to him as his for ever. Could it then be for a moment supposed that he would delegate to another the power to expel himself from his own home, and rescue victim after victim from his grasp, to set open the doors of their prison-house, and let the captives

go free? Satan was too crafty a tactician for any such suicidal act on his part: it was with no consent of his that his associate-spirits were dislodged one after another from their abodes in the persons of men: it was with no free-will of their own that these evil spirits cried out "We know Thee, who Thou art, the Holy One of God," or asked in terror "Art thou come to torment us before our time?" Satan had long ruled, as a monarch in the palace of man's heart, and with his own good will would have continued to reign, as long as men's souls could be taken captive by him at his will. Though an usurper, he would not, as long as all remained in peace, volunteer his own abdication, or submit to his deposition. If therefore their own senses assured them, as they did, that he was driven from his palace, that he was a wanderer and a fugitive, they might be convinced that One far stronger than Satan, One mighty to save, had indeed come, and taken from him all the armour wherein he trusted, dispossessed him of his strongholds, thrown open his dungeons, and had set the prisoner free. Well might the ransomed captive exclaim "Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us over as a prey unto their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler—the snare is broken and we are delivered."

Our Lord concludes His defence with the solemn admonition, "He that is not with Me is against Me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth."

He had before said in much tenderness, "He that is not against us is for us"—but the Gospel can and will admit of no passive neutrality. It was a solemn enquiry for these Jews—it is a solemn enquiry for ourselves. In one sense Satan does delegate his authority, and there are many subordinate masters ruling among men, and many cruel tyrants lording it over them. There is the world and the flesh—"the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life,"—the love of money, and the love of pleasure all holding commission from Beelzebub the chief of the devils. We dare not, we cannot, be passive in this warfare: if you are not gathering for Jesus, you are scattering for Satan's interest; if you are not on the side of Jesus, openly, avowedly, manfully, unflinchingly, you are against Him, on Satan's side. I would say to you as the aged captain of Israel's host said to his people, "Choose you this day, whom ye will serve"—and oh! that I may add for myself and for you, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

SECTION LIV.

(Chapter xi. verse 24—26.)

THE melancholy case represented in these verses has been generally supposed to be that of a backslider, who has, as it were, departed from his first

love, and like Demas been entangled again and ensnared by the allurements of sin and the world. But, to me, it seems to depict a far more deplorable and hopeless case. I do not mean to say that the backslider's is not a very deplorable case, but it is not a hopeless one. There are many calls in Scripture to the backslider, many promises of mercy, many assurances of forgiveness, if he will return. God says even to the backsliders, sad as their case is, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; mine anger is turned away from them." And how beautifully and tenderly is the long-suffering compassion of God towards His backsliding people represented by the prophet, "Return thou backsliding Israel, and I will not cause Mine anger to fall upon you, for I am merciful saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever:" and again reiterating His cry, "Turn, O backsliding children, for I am married unto you;" and once more, "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backsliding." So that there is mercy for the backslider, if he but seek it; the door of forgiveness and return is not closed and barred against him, if he will but knock at it. But the case in the verses before us seems to be one of hopeless irrecoverable apostacy—we have the final close of the man laid before us, and it is pronounced by the unerring judge to be worse than the first, and he is left, and, I think it is meant, for ever left in the grasp and power of the evil

spirits. I have called the man an apostate, but I doubt whether even that name belongs to him, and that when our Lord here says, "The last state of that man is worse than the first," He means to intimate that the whole career of the man from first to last has been bad, though the final close, the termination of the whole is the more melancholy and heart-rending, inasmuch as it is then irremediable—"There remaineth no more sacrifice for sins," "To whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." There was indeed a period when there was an outward change; we may suppose the profligacy or dissipation of youth laid aside, he has, as the world merrily observes, sown his wild oats, a dissolute course of life is found incompatible with his interests, or his worldly views, and he discards the grosser vices, which once stained his character. He may become a steady decorous man, a man of business and shrewdness, flourishing in his fortunes and well-considered in the world. But has there been any change of heart? has there been any conviction of sin, any contrition or lying low in the dust before God, with the cry, "Be merciful to me a sinner?" Not one jot, nor tittle of it—the heart from first to last has been unchanged, unhumbled. It is as if a Jew had covered his walls with gorgeous hangings and furniture, while the leprosy was festering beneath: so the house or heart is described as swept and garnished, that is, made more meet and

prepared for the master's use; and that master is the devil. Belial, the filthy spirit, perhaps has been expelled, but other spirits more wicked than he have entered in. Mammon, the dæmon of covetousness, pride, hard-heartedness, sensuality, and what is called the god of this world in all his strength and tyranny, and perhaps last and worst of all, scepticism and infidelity enter in, take full possession and keep full possession of the man, till sentence comes forth, the axe is laid unto the root of the tree, it is hewn down, and cast into the fire; and the last state of that man is undoubtedly more awfully, because irrecoverably, worse than the first. And yet all the time it has been creeping on so slowly and imperceptibly, that the world, and perhaps the unhappy man himself had no suspicion of the case. The very description of "swept and garnished" seems to imply a more than outward deference to decency, it seems to intimate a somewhat ostentatious pretension and display. It is not like a darkened room, in which as soon as light is admitted, you detect the dust and cobwebs: no real light seems to enter—no rude knocking disturbs his slumbers, no unwelcome visitor intrudes with angry frown or message. The heart is crying "peace, peace" to itself, and as described in the preceding verse, "his very goods are in peace;" and even at the last there may be 'no bands' in such an one's death; friends and relatives around may speak of his calm and peaceful end, and re-

cord his virtues, if not in their hearts, at least on monumental marble, while the record in God's own Book is, "The last state of that man is worse than the first."

SECTION LV.

(Chapter xi. verses 27—36.)
Matt. xii. 22—45. Mark iii. 22—30.

THE remark made by our Lord in reply to the woman who had exclaimed, "Blessed is the womb that bare Thee," is valuable on two accounts. It meets, and I cannot but think was emphatically intended by our Lord to meet, a very bad and grievous error, which His prescient spirit well knew would creep into and spread over so large and fair a portion of Christendom. I mean the Popish doctrine of the worship and exaltation of the Virgin Mary. The occasion of our Lord's remark was evidently an accidental one; but the remarks which the incident drew forth are not only in themselves most valuable and instructive, but most strongly condemnatory also of two most pernicious errors of the Church of Rome. I need not now enter on any proof of the rank which the Virgin Mary holds in Roman Catholic idolatry; it is sufficient to say that the mother of Jesus is worshipped and adored with more frequent and far more fervent prayer than Jesus Himself; that

her intercession and her mediation are more earnestly sought and more importunately solicited than the intercession of the Saviour Himself. This then is one of the glaring and fundamental errors of the Church of Rome, the idolatrous worship of the Virgin Mary. Another practice and error of the Romish Church is her denial of the Word of God to the members of her communion. I need hardly stop to prove this any more than her worship of the Virgin Mary—both practices are notorious, and though she rather resents and would fain deny the charge of preventing the circulation of the Word of God, yet no one is permitted to read it without a license in writing from the proper authorities of the Church; and by the fourth rule of the Council of Trent, "if any unlicensed person shall presume to read the Bible in the vulgar tongue, or to keep it in his possession, whether he reads it or not, he shall on no account receive absolution." And in a Bull of Pope Pius VII., in 1816, it speaks of the circulation of the Scriptures in the common languages as "a defilement of the faith," and declares our Protestant Bible to be "numbered among prohibited books." So much for the principles and practice of the Church of Rome on these two points: let us now see how our Lord meets and condemns them. The exclamation of this woman of the company was in itself a most natural and harmless one; stripped of its metaphorical phraseology it simply means,

"Happy is the mother of such a Son," and most assuredly "blessed among women" was the mother of our Lord; blessed, in being chosen of God for the honoured rank of the earthly parent of Jesus; and blessed, in the honoured testimony borne by the angel that the Lord was with her; and blessed, that amid all the virgins of Israel she was the forechosen and predicted of God to bear that promised seed, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed. And yet our Lord declares that there was a blessedness far, far beyond hers, and in comparison of which the blessedness of His mother was as dross. I cannot give you the emphatic meaning of the original, which we translate, "Yea rather," but it is an expression intimating not only no doubt, but the thoroughest conviction in the mind of the speaker, that the one is as much above the other, "as the heaven is high above the earth." And who is this blessed one, and what the blessedness to which Jesus here so emphatically assigns the palm? It is the sincere and single-minded reader of the Word of God—and it is to the possession of a copy of the Holy Scriptures—and the heart and the grace to read it—and to the privilege of hearing it read, "each one in his own tongue wherein he was born." So emphatically does our Lord here deny the higher blessedness which the Roman Catholics ascribe to His mother, and place far above even her blessedness the true blessedness of those who possess, and

hear, and read, and practise that Word of God which the Roman Catholic church refuses to the members of her faith. It is to me the most striking refutation of these two most glaring and aggravated errors of the Church of Rome, and the more striking, because so emphatically condensed into the brief compass of one short verse. And though probably the latter portion of this passage was not directed to the same purpose, there can be no doubt, that what our Lord says afterwards as strongly condemns the same practice. No man lights a candle in order to conceal its light under a bushel or a bed, but that they, on whom the darkness of the evening has come, may have the aid of the light to guide them in their different duties and occupations; so God revealed not His will, God gave not His Scriptures that man should place it under bar and barrier, or should close it with a clasped lock. He has expressly declared that He meant it should be "a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path." And it is a valuable caution which Jesus here suggests, to "take heed that the light we have be not darkness;" a caution alike applicable to the Protestant or Roman Catholic, to the perversion which prohibits and hides the Word, and the indifference which disregards and reads it not. The Bible denied and the Bible unused are equally sad, but the guilt of the owner of the unused book is far greater than his whose teachers withhold it from him.

SECTION LVI.

(Chapter xi. verse 37 to the end.)

WHO this Pharisee was that invited Jesus to his house, we do not know. Whoever he was he must have been strangely ignorant of the commonest courtesy to suppose that hospitality sanctioned rudeness to a guest, and that because he had invited Jesus to his house he was at liberty to animadvert on his guest's omitting to wash before He sat down to meat. We know that on a former occasion Jesus had been invited to another Pharisee's house, and the omission there had been on the other side, "Thou gavest me no water to wash," and yet Jesus had not noticed the neglect till the Pharisee's own remark extorted it from Him. And so cautious was He to avoid giving any unnecessary offence, that though, as the Son of God, He claimed exemption from the payment of the temple tribute-money, His remark to Peter was, "Notwithstanding, lest we should offend," pay it; and He even wrought a miracle that He might give no offence. The practice of "washing of hands before meat" was itself a simple and a harmless one, nay, according to oriental habits, a decorous custom; and in fact I do not know the clime where the observance of the custom would not be more honoured than the breach. And our Lord assuredly never would have violated the habitual

observances of society, had not a far higher and more important principle been at stake. The Pharisee's own conduct at least was a painful illustration of our Lord's simile of the man with the beam in his own eye, yet pretending a jealous anxiety to remove a mote out of his brother's eye. This man had invited Jesus to his house; but why? Was it from the feeling that the acceptance of the invitation would do himself honour that "he besought him to dine with him?" Was it to bring a blessing on his household—on "his basket and his store?" Was it to hear the words of eternal life from the lips of Him who spake as never man spake? Had he invited his friends and neighbours to sit at his table with Jesus that they too might get a blessing to their own souls? Alas! no; the invitation was in no friendly spirit, the motive was neither the inferior one of honour to himself, nor the higher one of good to his soul; but to lay a snare for the guest he had received beneath his roof. The friends and the neighbours who had been invited to meet the Saviour were invited to do no honour to Jesus, but to aid their host in his ungenerous and unmanly purpose of "catching something out of his mouth that they might accuse Him;" some of them, as the words evidently imply, lying in wait, keeping in the background, and ready to start forth on the first sound of an unguarded word; and others, like a hound upon the scent, or as Doddridge still more

emphatically explains the words, "like a dog fastening its teeth into its prey and holding it down." And so keen was this Pharisee on his malevolent design of entrapping Jesus, that he waits not even for a word spoken, but at once expresses his astonishment "that He had not first washed before dinner." And I think this explanation of the various circumstances attending this entertainment perfectly accounts for the severity of the rebuke which our Lord uttered on this occasion, and otherwise so at variance with the gentleness he usually evinced even towards his adversaries. We know from St. Mark's Gospel that washings and ablutions made an essential part of Jewish superstition, and that not merely to wash hands, but to wash pots, and vessels, and cups, and tables entered into their religious exercises. To do these things constituted, in their eyes, a religious character—to omit them an irreligious one. We might indeed well wonder at the ignorance that exalted such mere insignificant outward rites and ceremonies into matters of such serious and solemn importance as to determine a man's character, and religious consistency by his doing or leaving them undone. But we see at all times how prone man is to rest in that which is outward to the eye and palpable to the senses, rather than "the hidden man of the heart," "the life hid with Christ in God;" and to prefer outside cleanness and decorous observances to inward purity and holiness of heart,

or perhaps to think that a grave demeanour and a religious aspect either of themselves promote religion, or assuredly conceal irreligion, as the gorgeous tomb hides the memorials of decay within. External ceremonies and observances are not only more easy, but more attractive—they gratify the corrupt principle of our nature, while they profess to eradicate it—they can be seen of men—they engage attention and excite admiration, and thus foster vanity and conceit—while the silent, secret communion of the heart with its Maker is seldom or never known, and seeks and needs no witnesses on earth; and therefore carnal man, in his ignorance, values the outward act, which can be seen of men, but is not careful to accompany it with that earnest desire that he may be "strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in his heart by faith."

SECTION LVII.

(Chapter xii. verse 1—12.)

WHEN one reads of the numbers who so continually flocked after Jesus, of the thousands and ten thousands who as here so crowded around Him, that they trode one upon another, one is almost ready to ask why, after all, so little real conversion attended the personal preaching of the Saviour,

accompanied as it was by such unnumbered evidences of power and mercy in healing their various sicknesses. If success were to be taken as the test of any work, we must say that the personal work of Jesus was singularly unsuccessful, and there must have been some reason to account for a result so altogether improbable. It was not assuredly that His preaching was without authority, for at the close of the very first sermon He delivered, it is said that, "the people were astonished at His sayings, for He taught them as one having authority." It was not that His delivery was without power, for on another occasion, when officers were sent to seize Him and returned without effecting their purpose, they alleged as their excuse the resistless energy and power of His words, "Never man spake like this man." Nor was it certainly without influence, for as a general result it may be said, "the common people heard Him gladly." We may well resolve it into the fact that it was not consistent with the counsels of the Almighty that many should be converted till after the death of Jesus. It was His own emphatic declaration, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." And He refers not only the gathering-in itself, but the cause of that gathering to the very event, which, humanly speaking, would have crushed every hope for ever: "And I, if I be lifted up,

will draw all men unto me." One might indeed easily imagine the difficulties that would have been thrown in the way of the final sentence of condemnation against Jesus, if all these crowds who thus flocked to Him had been real and decided followers and converts—how difficult to have roused the cry of "Crucify Him, crucify Him," from hearts throbbing with intense interest and zeal in His behalf. Even as it was they dreaded, if they let Him alone, that all men would believe on Him, and in the case of violence, that there would be an uproar among the people. But there is no need to pursue this thought further. God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, and He to whom a thousand years are but as a day, may well have a different measurement from our own, and reserve times and seasons in His own hands. What a wonderful revelation will that day discover, when, as our Lord here says, "There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be known." This is in some degree often realized even in life—much that was dark and mysterious—much that was discouraging and disappointing, hindering, and oppressive, has been cleared up, and the things that threatened to be an occasion of falling, have turned out to be stepping stones for our very progress. It is however a very solemn warning which Jesus holds out—with respect not only to the hidden works, but the hidden words of darkness.

We are so apt to think that what is not seen is not known—so apt to associate the idea of secrecy and concealment with what we whisper in another's ear, that we cannot realize the conviction that it is hereafter to be proclaimed and published. There can be no concealment then, the secrets of all hearts, and the secrets of all households—what has been whispered in the ear—what has been done in the dark—what has been uttered in the secrecy and retirement of every chamber—every word of sin that children may have picked up from their parent's lips—every lesson of ungodliness that they have learned from their practice—all will be disclosed. How many enticements to sin have been whispered into another's ear, which no other ear has heard—how many suggestions to wrong been insinuated rather than uttered, and yet have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth! And yet Jesus would not have his disciples think that there was no consolation in this assurance. Oh no! He would have them know, that every cry from the deep solitude of a martyr's dungeon—every midnight prayer, unheard by living ear—the sorrowful sighing of the prisoner—and the very tears of God's afflicted ones, had all voices which reach to heaven. The blood of martyred ones has moistened God's earth from the day when "a brother's blood cried unto God from the ground;" and of every martyr's blood, since that day, whether in Israel or Jerusalem, in

Christian or in heathen land, not one drop has fallen unnoticed or unknown. How truly might He add, "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do." And how pointedly does the solemn warning belong to them and to ourselves also to fear Him, who, after He hath killed, hath power to cast into hell."

SECTION LVIII.

(Chapter xii. verse 13—21.)

THE occasion of this most impressive parable was a man's asking the Lord to interfere with regard to some disputed inheritance between himself and his brother. Jesus refuses the office, either because He had no civil power nor authority in the state, and would not therefore invidiously assume what did not belong to Him, or, more probably, because it formed no portion of His Father's work or will that He should interfere in such merely secular and worldly matters. His work on earth was to preach the kingdom of God, and to prepare men's minds for that fuller revelation of it which was to take place after His return to heaven. But with His usual readiness to avail Himself of every incident to inculcate impressive truths, and in season and out of season to endeavour to win souls,

He takes advantage of the circumstance to deliver the parable I have just read. The inference which our Lord Himself draws from it is of course the right clue to its real purport. It is not directed merely and only against covetousness, though of course that is most strongly reprobated, nor against selfishness, though probably selfishness was never more hatefully delineated, nor against the insecurity of worldly prosperity, and even life itself, though that is most fearfully exemplified in the sudden end of that unhappy man: but the great lesson which our Lord intends us to learn from it is that miserable want of foresight, which lays up provision for time, and calculates not only on the days but on the years of time, and yet altogether forgets eternity and God. With all his earthly treasures, his abundant crops, his stored barns, his piled garners, this man is pronounced to be, by an unerring judgment, not rich—as regarded God. The man here described is one of those thoroughly worldly selfish characters, with whom I am afraid the world abounds. We meet with them everywhere and in every class—men whose every thought is centered in self, whose hearts never expand, or if they open for a moment in a season of festivity, it is because they themselves are enjoying it, and not because others are sharing it with them. They are busy and bustling, shrewd and active, rude and over-bearing, and look upon every good as the work of their own hands, and would regard any

idea of responsibility to God or man as an insult to their understanding. If matters go ill, they grumble as if a positive wrong and injustice were done to them; and if they go well, they are disappointed that they are not better, and look rather to what might have been added, than to what has been given.

The man in the parable is described as a tiller of land, as in fact a farmer, looking forward to the prospect of an abundant harvest. He had himself probably risen early and late taken rest—the season had been favourable, God's sunshine, and the early and the latter rain, had been, as he could have wished—and now as the harvest and vintage-time draws nigh he looks over his fields and his vineyards and oliveyards—and sees that, indeed, "the harvest is plenteous"—and what is his language? Is it praise and thanksgiving to Him, who had "commanded the blessing upon him in his store-houses, and in all that he had set his hand unto, and who had blessed him in the land which the Lord his God had given him?" Nothing of the kind—God was not in his thoughts at all. With the peculiar propensity of his class, he murmurs at the very abundance God had given him, and describes it as a source of perplexity and trouble to him. What shall I do? Had indeed the Almighty sent His storm to lay waste his fields as He did the Egyptian harvest, or as He did the wheat harvest in the time of Samuel—had God

commissioned "His great army" to devour and to destroy, "and that which the palmer-worm had left, the locust had eaten, and that which the locust had left, the canker-worm had eaten, and that which the canker-worm had left, the caterpillar had eaten"—had he glanced over such a work of desolation in his fields, one might have expected the exclamation of "What shall I do," for my "fields are wasted and the land mourneth." But what is the cause of his murmuring here? It is, "What shall I do, for I have not room where to bestow my goods." Some of you, no doubt, remember with what honest and almost holy indignation the Roman poet inveighs against such selfish heapings up of wealth, and their lavish expenditure on their possessor's own gratification, and asks why any deserving man is in want, while any one possesses such superfluous abundance—why the temples of the gods are falling into decay, and whether there were not institutions in his country, for which he could measure from such a heap?* So we might say of this man. There were ways and means enough where to bestow his goods without overloading his barns or building greater; there were channels enough, in which he could have

* "Cur eget indignus quisquam te divite? Quare
Templa ruunt Antiqua Deûm? Cur, improbe, caræ
Non aliquid patriæ tanto emetiris acervo?
Uni nimirum tibi recte semper erunt res?"
Hor. Sat. ii., Lib. ii., 103.

enriched others without impoverishing himself, for "there is that scattereth and yet increaseth." But it was not so. Self was the pivot around which every thought turned—a neighbour's good, or a fellow-creature's added comfort never crossed his mind—it was naked, undisguised selfishness and sensuality from first to last. It was 'my barns,' 'my fruits,' 'my goods,' 'my soul.'

Of course the lesson here is most striking in the suddenness, with which the whole fabric of his worldly schemes is laid in the dust. It is not even the worm that God had prepared for Jonah's gourd, for Jonah awoke to find the shadow, in which he had rejoiced, gone: but this man was never to awake on earth. "I will pull down, and I will build" was his decision; but God altered it and said, "I will pull down, and thou shalt not build." He had accumulated wealth to last for many years, but had not made the smallest provision for that fearful account he had that night to give in to God.*

* I have often thought that that honest burst of holy indignation expressed by Evelyn in his *Diary of the Sabbath Evening preceding the death of Charles II.*, is a striking illustration of this parable of our Lord's.

"I can never forget the inexpressible luxury and prophanenesse, gaming and all dissoluteness, and as it were total forgetfullnesse of God (it being Sunday evening), which this day se'nnight I was witness of—the King sitting and toying with his concubines.... whilst about 20 of the grate courtiers, and other dissolute persons, were at basset round a large table, a bank of at least 2000 in gold before them. *Six days after all was in the dust!*"—*Evelyn's Diary*, vol. iii., p. 137.

SECTION LIX.

(Chapter xii. verse 22—31.)

THIS passage of Scripture is almost a literal repetition of a portion of the sermon on the mount as recorded in one of the earlier chapters of St. Matthew's Gospel. But I do not know in the whole compass of sacred or profane literature a passage, which, with so much tenderness, so much sympathy and feeling, meets the case of the timid, distrustful, over-anxious child of God. There are many such even in the Lord's family and household; and even long experience of a Father's love and care hardly seems to lessen their anxiety as regards future trials; and therefore it is that Jesus with so much of sympathy, with so much of a brother's love, proceeds here to reason with His weaker brothers and sisters on the groundlessness of their fears and apprehensions. There is not a word of harshness or unkindness in the whole passage—far less does He meet their case with contempt or derision. It is enough for Him that these are sorrowing and desponding children, and though their sorrow be needless, and their despondency without foundation, He seems to enter fully into every feeling, and as if He would realize His own predicted character that a bruised reed would He not break. They *are* bruised ones, and though it be true, that they are needlessly bruising their

ownselves, He would yet bind them up and mollify them with ointment like a kind and tender physician. "Take no thought." The words, it is well known, do not forbid all thought or care even about such apparently trifling matters as food and raiment: they forbid or discountenance only over-anxious care and unnecessary waste of time about them, and, still more, distrustful fears as to their continuance or withdrawal: but our Father is too tender, too considerate to forbid *all* thought about such. He knows whereof we are made, nay, He has Himself so constituted our frames, that these very points must occupy a certain amount of each one's time and thought—and He who has so compassionately assured us that things so insignificant as the hairs of our head are all numbered, never meant to censure that due attention to those matters of daily household requirement, which daily duty demands. But there is a vast amount of difference between the needful care and supervision which such matters require, and which cannot be neglected without omission of duty and therefore without sin, and that devotion of too much care, too much time, too much anxiety to such matters, to the exclusion or postponement or neglect of more serious and important duties; and, still more, that distrust of God's superintending love and provision for all His creatures, and the works of His hands, through every gradation of

existence and creation, from man to the tiniest insect and the humblest weed.

The caution here is against not taking God sufficiently at His word. Hath He said, and shall He not make it good? He has said, "Bread shall be sure, and water shall be sure"—and what our Lord here would impress upon us is that the same comprehensive love which feeds the beasts that roam in the desert, and the wild fowl that have their habitations far from the haunts of men, will provide for His children the food they need and the raiment they require. But it may be asked, Do God's children never want? I dare not say they never do. I know that David has left on record his testimony to what he knew and had seen of God's protecting care—"I have been young, and now am old—and yet saw I never the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread." I do not want to give a wider scope to David's words than they will bear—they are, I am willing to allow, only the testimony of David's own experience—*he* had never seen such a case. But I very much doubt whether any one else has. I believe the Psalmist's words to be most extensively true, and true to the end of time. Many a one we no doubt do see begging their bread, and even in David's time, it was said of every one that was left in Eli's house, that he should "come and crouch for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread,"

but it was in righteous judgment that this sentence was pronounced. And though I do not say that the Lord never permits even bitter and painful trials, and long continued ones too, to assail them, yet I do see, every day, such almost miraculous and unexpected interposition of God's providence in behalf of so many of His children, in sending what is needful at the very moment it is needed, and sending no more than is needed for the moment, that as they live on the Lord's bounty to-day, so faith may assure them of the same supply to-morrow: the barrel of meal may be very low, yet its daily supply will never waste; the cruse of oil may run scantily, but it will never fail; and I believe it to be literally and strictly true that "if we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, all things necessary and good *shall* be added to us." Let us never be tempted to fritter down God's "*shall*" into man's "*may be.*"

SECTION LX.

(Chapter xii. verse 32—40.)

THE preceding verses, you remember, were on the subject of over-anxiety as to worldly matters. Our Lord well knew that in His Father's family there were and would be many such timid and desponding spirits, and He therefore set Himself

with much tenderness and even sympathy to dispel such anxious fears and apprehensions. And it is now with the same tender solicitude that those should not be sad whom the Lord had not made sad, that He here proceeds to offer another, and, if it were possible, a still more effectual cure of despondency and anxiety than even the promise of God. There might be, even in God's children, somewhat of distrust even of the Lord's promise, somewhat too, it may be, of dread to apply it, and appropriate its comfort to themselves—and Jesus seems to intimate as much when He addresses them as "O ye of little faith." But the prescription here given, the rule here laid down, is not to keep your treasure on earth, but as it were to put it out of harm's way elsewhere—in other words to have the heart preoccupied with a desire for heavenly treasure, to divest yourselves, as far as you can, of these earthly possessions which only encrease care, and distribute them in such a way, that when you fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations, or as our Lord phrases it, in the certain assurance that you will have treasure in heaven. It is in fact nearly the same counsel which Jesus gave to the rich young man, who enquired the way to heaven, only that with him He made the rule stricter, and said, "Sell *all* that you have and give to the poor"—but He here enlarges on His counsel, and justifies it by other considerations. Earthly treasure may slip away, it may crumble to decay

even in your closest grasp, or death may come at a moment's or rather without a moment's notice, as it did to the miserable man whose ground brought forth so plentifully, and then whose shall those things be that thou hast provided? But treasures laid up for heaven are stored away as it were in bags that know neither wear nor tear, which no thief can diminish, and no corroding insect spoil. If then you feel that such treasure is laid up for you in heaven—if your affections are indeed set on things above and not on things on the earth, your heart will ascend to where your treasure is, and wait with unruffled patience, till you are put in possession of your inheritance. The usual sources of care and anxiety about worldly matters will then be dried up and destroyed: the treasure is safe in heaven, safe where nothing can enter to mar or corrode, safe in the keeping of Jesus Christ, and the heart rests satisfied and contented in that assurance of the apostle, "I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day," when I shall need it. No doubts, no difficulties, no anxieties as to lower earthly cares: the treasure is in heaven, and where the treasure is, there the heart, and the heart's best affections are also. But, remember, he whose treasure is in heaven must not live as if it were still on earth, and he grovelling and groping for it there. He may indeed have found no inheritance, save daily toil, on earth, he may be of the lowest and poorest

of God's family—he may have remained through a life-long career in the same lowly post, his contemporaries have long since passed him in the race, and even those that were unborn when he commenced his course, are too beyond him, and there may be moments of weariness, of despondency, it may be of temptation and evil suggestion also, that he has laboured in vain; yet into how many a nook of lowliness and obscurity, and with what joyous surprise, with what grateful and admiring wonder will many a lowly one, unrecognized and unnoticed and passed by on earth, hear the gracious call, "Friend, come up higher." Jesus may send to him at any hour the summons, and call him to sit down to meat with Him—nay more, in His condescending and overflowing love, He deigns to describe Himself as waiting on them, not merely as coming in to see the guests, but as ministering unto them, and Himself seeing and taking care that all their wants are supplied—all their desires satisfied. And yet we are the servants—our Master is away from home, and has left us in charge of His interests, His work, His glory, till His return. He has promised indeed that He will return, but He has not intimated the day nor the hour. The faithful servant however can never be taken off his guard—his Master may return at a moment when he does not expect Him, but it can hardly be said, when he is not looking for Him—for his heart is with his Master, his affections are

ever going out as it were after Him, and when that Master knocks at the door, and the well-known summons is heard, and the well-loved voice recognized, though it may be an unexpected, it can never be an unwelcome surprise, and he joyously exclaims, "It is my Master's voice"—"Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."

SECTION LXI.

(Chapter xii. verse 41—48.)

It would be a good rule for every one, when they hear God's word read or preached, to adopt the spirit of Peter's question, and say each one to our own hearts, "Lord, speakest thou this unto us, was this addressed to me? does this suit my case, does it come home to my conscience—has this text a message for me?" I am afraid that there are many far more keen-sighted in applying passages to the peculiar circumstances, positions, faults and tempers of their neighbours, than of their own. It is poor unprofitable work to be always groping in the dust that is lying at a neighbour's door, when there is so large a heap at our own: and it is not without especial significance that our Lord calls such an one a hypocrite: "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote

that is in thy brother's eye;" for one must needs think that it is to draw off attention from their own shame that persons are so anxious to direct attention to the faults and failings of others. And St. Paul distinctly alleges that such conduct is altogether without excuse: "Thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest, for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself, for thou that judgest doest the same things." It would tend very much to stop such uncharitable surmises of others, and to lead to a far more searching scrutiny of our own hearts, to apply to our cases any particular text or passage that may strike us: "Lord, does this mean me? Sayest Thou this to me; teach me to lay hold of Thy Word." I have read of an eminent minister, now with God, that on reading or hearing the words, "The unsearchable riches of Christ," he was arrested by the feeling how different the sentiment of him who penned those words from his own. He had never discovered any unsearchable riches in Christ—he had probably never sought for any—he had never contemplated, and therefore never admired, "the exceeding riches of Christ's grace." The words now struck him with an irresistible force, that what one had sought and found, he might seek and find also—that that grace which had so enriched an apostle would not be denied even to him. And the result was that he became one of the most useful and pious minis-

ters of his day.* There is another instance recorded by Joseph Milner, the historian of the Church of Christ, of one of whom he has left a brief biography, that he was arrested even more powerfully and instantaneously by a verse of Scripture, which he, Milner, had selected as the text of his sermon on the day in question: "Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." "No sooner," it is the man's own narrative, "No sooner was the text delivered, than the word reached my heart, quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword, insomuch that I quaked and trembled. I was so confounded that I knew not a word the preacher delivered after giving out his text—even that I forgot. On returning home, I begged my host to shew me the text. I now began to pray from a wounded spirit, and humbled myself before God, confessing my sins, and crying out for mercy, if peradventure He would hear me." It was once more the voice from heaven arresting the blasphemer and the persecutor—once more the cry ascended to heaven, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Once more the Lord looked and listened, and said, "Behold, he

* *Fawcett's Christian Life*, p. 31.

prayeth," and sent His minister, as He did Ananias, with a message of mercy and peace. I have mentioned these two instances, because they are as striking in their similarity as in their contrast. They both resulted in sincere, genuine conversion; but in the one case the words of Scripture fell like snow-flakes, as soft and gentle and yet as surely and as deeply penetrating as they; in the other, if we may so speak, the word came down like a sledge-hammer, crushing everything before it, and beating down the strongholds of sin and Satan in an instant. I can well believe that there are few on whom a text of Scripture, or a passage of a sermon, or a prayer, has not at times fastened with peculiar force; and it is mostly on the youthful mind that it does so. The feelings are more sensitive, the imagination more vivid, the affections more ardent, and the heart less hardened. Alas! as we grow older, we find impressions far less powerful, less enduring; and I would therefore say to you, in the days of your youth especially, what in fact I would say to myself and the oldest among us, 'beware how you tamper with such impressions;' if a text of Scripture fastens upon your mind and lingers in your memory with a tenacity that surprizes you, do not endeavour to drive it out and dismiss it as an unwelcome intruder, but say as Peter did here, "Lord! speakest Thou this to me? Is this a message to my soul? Lord! what wilt thou have me

to do?" It may be a message; but even a message of love may be slighted—an entreaty of affection from an earthly parent is often scorned and turned away from. Turn not from Him that speaketh from heaven. "They who know their Lord's will, yet do it not, will be beaten with many stripes." I cannot imagine that it will be any mitigation of the *sorrows* of hell, that there may be a gradation in its *torments*. The saddened soul looking out from its prisoned chambers will find no alleviation of its own never-ending remorse in the knowledge that another may be writhing under more aggravated punishment. "To whomsoever much is given, of him will much be required." And to whatsoever soul God in His mercy sends by His Holy Spirit a messenger of grace, of that soul will He assuredly demand it.

SECTION LXII.

(Chapter xii. verse 49 to the end.)

When our Lord says here, "I am come to send fire on earth," it seems to be very much at variance with what the angels at the birth of Jesus declared to be the purpose of His coming, which was, "on earth peace, good-will towards men." And indeed such was the meaning of the Gospel, "good tidings of great joy as well as peace." And

yet we have here our Lord's assertion that its effects would be very contrary; nor can we deny that such has been the case: and that more of desolation, persecution, cruelty and outrage has been perpetrated in the name of religion, and Christ's religion too, than by any other cause in the world. And many a scorner and sceptic has for this reason questioned and denied the divine original of a religion, which has permitted such inhumanities and atrocities to take place under the sanction of her name. The horrors of the Inquisition and the cruel persecutions of the Scottish Covenanters, shew that it is confined to no sect nor party; and the names even of Cranmer and Calvin have cast as sad a stain on Protestantism by "consenting unto the death" of martyrs, and giving sanction to the notion that the religion of the holy Jesus required heresy to be extirpated by fire. Alas! that names so venerable and holy should be found mixed up with so much that is painful and humiliating. And yet the very circumstance of our Lord predicting such a result, so completely at variance with the benign and heavenly purposes of His mission, is perhaps as strong a proof as possible of its divine original. Jesus does not here assert that His coming on earth was for the purpose of kindling this fire—He does not say, nor mean to say, that this was the object of His mission, the purpose of His errand; but He simply states it as a result that would inevitably

ensue, and He accordingly prepares the mind of His disciples for such a result, that their faith might not be shaken nor weakened by an event so contrary to every expectation. And when we look at mankind, their bitter animosities one to another, the collisions between their mutual interests, the heart-burnings and jealousies which exist one with another, one may well account for such a statement without charging it to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It was not His followers only that were thus to meet with cruel outrage and persecution; but He Himself was to lead the way in His own baptism of blood. The same eye that with such distinctness foresaw all the wrongs that would be perpetrated under the sanction of His name, and under the plea of furthering His religion, saw also as minutely His own sufferings from the malice of some, and the misguided zeal of many. And with what touching tenderness does He speak of it, as if the very energies of His soul were paralyzed, till His death was accomplished. "How am I straitened!" is His cry, as if He felt that the whole current of His tender purposes for man's redemption could not flow free and unrestrained, till the sacrifice had been offered and the victim slain—till the atonement had been accepted, and man's reconciliation to God effected. How did the compassionate Jesus long for that accomplishment of the work—willing, if it were possible, to hurry on his own sufferings that man's

redemption might be earlier won. It is no doubt a sad picture which is here given of domestic dissension, of the closest ties rent asunder, and the dearest affections destroyed, and yet it was a still more heightened picture which the Lord had given by His prophet Micah, when, no doubt with reference even to Gospel times, He said, "Trust ye not in a friend—put ye not confidence in a guide—keep the door of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom," and then follow the very words which the Saviour adopts as His own: "For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house." But is religion or the Gospel the cause of this? Assuredly not: it is the want of the Gospel—it is the absence of religion—it has not as yet leavened that family in which these differences arise. The fruit of the Spirit is "love, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness." "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits;" and if these do not abound, it is because the spirit of Christ is not in that household. And alas! men will go on to "hurt and to destroy," and may perhaps pretend a zeal for religion in all they do, but it will not be till that predicted hastening time, when "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea," that that millennial unity and love

shall pervade all creation; when "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them." Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

SECTION LXIII.

(Chapter xiii. verse 1—5.)

Of the particular circumstances to which our Lord alludes in these verses we know scarcely anything. History so indistinctly alludes to the first, and so entirely passes over the other, that beyond the fact that Pilate had wantonly, or it may have been in some seditious disturbance, caused certain Galilæans to be slain, whose blood, as it flowed, mingled with the blood of the victims upon the altars, and that a certain tower in Siloam had fallen, crushing beneath its ruins eighteen unhappy sufferers, beyond these facts we know nothing. And is not such the case with thousands and thousands of the calamities and casualties that have befallen the world in every age. Who those Galilæans were, or who those eighteen whose mangled bodies lay beneath the ruins of Siloam's tower, we know nothing—their very names have perished; and but for the apparently accidental mention of the fact by our Lord, the very cir-

cumstance would have been forgotten too. And yet no doubt at the time it created great interest and excitement; Pilate's name must have been uttered with execrations by the people, whose feelings he had so outraged. And many a bereaved relative no doubt shed tears of bitter sorrow over the untimely graves of those of whom they had been thus deprived. Both mourners and mourned however have long since passed away; the world has gone on in its usual course—summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, have successively run their allotted seasons—other joys and other sorrows have occurred—other ties and interests have risen up—other demands on our sympathies and anxieties have been made—persecutions and cruelties, calamities and accidents, falling towers and desolating inundations, storms and shipwrecks, famines and pestilences have ever since at times swept the world; and man has had to mourn more for those sorrows in which he himself has had a share than for those of which he only reads or hears; and we might almost think we had no other interest in this unhappy story than we had in any other tale of woe. And yet it is not so. The doom of the Galilæan victims and of the sufferers at Siloam has been recorded in imperishable annals, and for eighteen hundred years and more their story has been familiar throughout Christendom; we might say of them, as Jesus said of the woman, who anointed His feet with ointment: "Wheresoever

the Gospel shall be preached, this that she hath done—this that they have suffered—shall be told for a memorial of them." And why? because He who spake as man never spake, has invested it with a moral, which forcibly applied to those to whom He spoke it; and has, with equal force, applied to every generation since, and it still teaches the same instructive and salutary lesson to ourselves now. And the lesson is this, that though no doubt every event that befalls man, whether of a joyous or afflictive character, comes from Him, without whose permission not a sparrow falleth to the ground, yet as we are in no degree justified in inferring God's approval from prosperity, far less are we authorized to infer God's wrath and severity from His judgments. I am afraid we are all too apt to do this; we are so prone to associate punishment and suffering, to look upon sorrow as inseparable from sin, that we seldom see a condition of suffering, or hear of a disaster, but we at once set ourselves to work to enquire and find out in what it is the manifestation of God's indignation and the penalty of sin; and so indeed in one sense it is, for there would be no sorrow, no suffering, no calamity, but for sin; but we are not in any degree justified in singling out any individual calamity as an evidence of God's especial wrath. It was the mistake which Job's friends made in their over-haste to condemn Job; but to make that argument consistent, they

should have maintained that Job's sons and daughters were even more guilty than they deemed the father, inasmuch as the house, in which they were eating and drinking, fell upon them and destroyed them all. We know that earthquakes shatter, fires consume, mines explode, storms shipwreck, and buildings crush, and we may add of our own days railways mangle without selection of their victims. I know that Abraham in pleading with the Lord for Sodom urged as a plea, "Wilt Thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked," and pleading as he was for "righteous Lot?" it was a valid plea; but in these, the usual calamities of life, the Lord does permit the righteous to be blended with the wicked. But that is not the lesson here; it is that, when, or because a calamity has overtaken a man, we are not to conclude that it has befallen him by way of punishment. It is a far more valuable lesson which Jesus here teaches us, to make every accident or disaster or calamity that befalls a fellow-creature, a subject of self-examination to ourselves—of thanksgiving that we are spared—of confession that we have deserved far greater and severer at the Lord's hands, and a resolution, through God's grace, to repent and amend, wherein we have done amiss, lest a worse thing befall ourselves.

SECTION LXIV.

(Chapter xiii. verse 6—10.)

THE meaning of this parable of the fig-tree, though no doubt intended to enforce the preceding warning of the necessity of timely repentance, and though addressed primarily to the Jewish nation, is so applicable to every individual of every nation, and so full of instruction to ourselves, that I shall pass over its application to Israel, and the somewhat fanciful suggestion of some commentators of the "three years" referring to the three dispensations of the Law, the Prophets, and the Baptist, and consider it only as referring to ourselves. There is no figure more frequently used in Scripture, than that which represents God as planting a vineyard and looking for the fruit, or sowing seed and expecting its produce. It is one not only so easily understood, but so fully entered into by every one, that both reason and experience confirm the fitness of the image. I do not say that we have all planted a vineyard; but even the youngest child knows what it is to sow seeds—with what hopefulness he commits them to the ground—with what anxiety he watches over them—with what impatience he waits for their development and growth—and with what triumph he bears off the first produce of his labours—and, we must add, with what real sorrow he would find

all his expectations disappointed, and his seed come to nothing. It is a natural, though perhaps you may think it a somewhat childish image, and yet it is the very one under which Jesus has chosen to represent His Father's expectations and long-suffering, but at last exhausted patience, and His own earnest and impassioned intercession and pleading in behalf of sinners. We may truly say, that as sketched in the words of Jesus, it is a most touching representation of the long-suffering and forbearance of a God of love, disappointed in His most anxious hopes and expectations, yet still hoping on, still using every effort that the most unwearied patience could suggest and the most anxious affection prompt to avert that final doom which yet He sees must inevitably overtake them. There can be no difficulty who this owner of the fig-tree is, nor whom the fig-tree represents. The owner is undoubtedly the Lord God, who originally planted man in the Garden of Eden,—there He came seeking fruit, and there at least one might have expected that He would have found it. But no! even there, even in Paradise man was found a cumberer of the ground, and was driven forth into exile, and labour, and death. He came again to see if there were any amendment, any appearance of fruit. "God looked upon the earth, and behold it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth." There was much pleading even then to spare it yet awhile; and for an

hundred and twenty years "the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing." God again brought forth a vine out of Egypt, and planted it in a noble soil, the glory of all lands, with every barrier to avert injury, and made room for it to flourish and take root; and for a season it did flourish. And yet after a while when God came down to behold and visit His vine, it brought forth only wild grapes. Yet the intercessor pleaded even for rebellious Israel, and represents Himself "from the day that their fathers came forth from the land of Egypt, sending unto them all His servants, the prophets, daily rising up early," like an assiduous gardener. And yet they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck, and did worse than their fathers; and therefore at last He plucked down *her* hedges, cut down the vineyard which His right hand had planted, and burned it with fire. And has He not now planted another vine, a noble tree, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations? And as He looked for fruit in Paradise, and in Palestine, so does He come seeking fruit in Christendom. The Gospel is still spared to us, God's Sabbaths are still spared to us, there is One that intercedeth for guilty England as He pleaded for rebellious Israel.

But how is it with regard to each one of ourselves? God comes in youth and looks for fruit. But alas! how often does the young fruit-tree

disappoint His just expectation, and He finds none. He might justly bid it be uprooted, and a fairer tree planted in its place; but He hears a voice, saying, "Lord, let it alone this year also," and so God spares it. And He comes again in manhood for the fruit of His tree; but it is still barren—still disappointed hopes—still unprofitable labours: and the righteous sentence issues forth: "Cut it down! why cumbereth it the ground?" But again there is One by His side to plead once more in its behalf: "Lord, let it alone *this* year also," and it is spared. And the Lord comes again in old age, and surely thinks to find grey hairs in the way of righteousness; but alas it is more hopeless than ever, withered and rent, and split and leafless. Yet even in this extremity the never-failing Intercessor pleads for one more short respite, and suggests such means as may perhaps revive it: "I will dig about it, and dung it," and if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then like righteous Abraham, He will plead no more for guilty Sodom. The intercession of the blessed Jesus is but conditional—it affixes a period when that intercession will be exercised no more, when mercy will no longer plead against judgment: "Let it alone this year? but for what purpose? till I shall dig about it and dung it," and if it bear fruit, well; and what if it bear not fruit?—what if the season be unimproved,—if the space allotted be wasted—if the time of grace be unheeded—if the

day of salvation be disregarded? What then? "Then, after that, thou shalt cut it down."

SECTION LXV.

(Chapter xiii. verse 11—17.)

THIS miracle of healing a poor deformed woman, who, in spite of her lengthened infirmities, had yet with a willing spirit, though feeble step, dragged herself to the house of prayer, and there met with Jesus, is a striking illustration of the sovereign grace of God in the conversion of a sinner. This daughter of Abraham had been afflicted with her infirmity eighteen years, and was so bowed and bent double that she had no power to raise herself: and the condition of this poor sufferer resembles the condition of a man "tied and bound with the chain of his sins." He too may have been long in this condition; year after year may have seen him grovelling earthwards—his passions and appetites seeking their gratification in earthly objects and pursuits, and his affections so entirely chained to things below, that, like this poor sufferer, he has not the power to arise, but also, unlike her, has not even the desire to "arise and go to his Father." Or, one may imagine even a more painful case of one, from long indulgence so besotted to his sin, that from his companion and associate it

has become his tyrant, his unrelenting task-master; and though he knows and feels that it is destroying both body and soul, though there are moments of acutest remorse, when he looks back on the past and gazes on the present, when he thinks of what he was, ere his vice enchained him, and sees what he is as its victim and its drudge; and though there are agonizing forethoughts of the future, and he would give worlds to be "loosed from his infirmity" and sin, yet even in his horror, and because of his horror, he rushes again to its fascination, and exclaims "I will seek it yet again." I remember some few years ago reading in the public press of an unhappy being of this description, who was so besotted to his sin, that in his last moments he declared that if his favourite beverage were on one side, and hell itself on the other, he could not resist, though the next plunge were into the fire that yawned for him. And surely we may say in this, and in every case, the resemblance holds good as to the cause and origin of both their maladies. Satan had bound this poor woman, and held her in bondage, lo! these eighteen years: and is not the sinner still taken captive of the devil at his will? Yet this sufferer found mercy—not from any cry of hers to the Saviour for relief, for she utters none! Whether she had crawled to the synagogue to seek and to find mercy at the hands of Jesus, or to pour out the full sorrows of her overburthened heart in prayer, we cannot say—but

whatever her motive Jesus forestalled her purpose, and anticipated her petition, and as soon as His eye rested on her piteous case, He called her to Him, and said, "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity." It was His own promise, it was His own assurance and prediction realized, "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." And is not the same true of many a poor sinner, even literally true—was it not true of Saul, when Jesus met him on his road to Damascus? and does He not in the pitifulness of His great mercy still meet the sinner, and say to him, "Thou art loosed from thy bondage;" and he feels how of His own will, His own sovereign grace the Saviour has met with him, and freely said unto him, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee.' There were many no doubt even in that synagogue, who needed to be loosened from the heavy bondage of their prejudices, and their unkind feelings against the Saviour; and who even cavilled at this act of mercy, as if it were an act of impiety and profaneness; but we do not hear Jesus saying to this ruler of the synagogue, or any other there, 'Thou art loosed from thine infirmity.' So it was in earlier times: "There were many lepers in Israel in the days of Eliseus, but unto none of them was Eliseus sent," save to a Syrian leper,—and "there were many widows in Israel" in the time of famine, and yet only to a Sidonian widow was Elijah sent; and who shall

say of the Lord's dealings then or now, 'What doest Thou?' because He releases one, and passes by another? "Is there then unrighteousness with God?" God forbid! For He saith to Moses, "I will have mercy, on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion, on whom I will have compassion." And yet it is a blessed and a precious truth, which Jesus uttered, in perfect consistency and keeping with His own and His Father's dealings, "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in nowise cast out." There is no discouragement nor repulse there—not a word to deter the feeblest cripple, nor the sinner even of fourscore years' standing. It was indeed a long captivity, that of eighteen years! though man's cruelty has often outrun that of Satan himself, and held many a victim in far more lengthened bondage: and yet Satan of his own accord never unloosed any victim's chains, and let the prisoner go free. It is still a limited power which he possesses—the "strong man armed" comes down upon him, takes from him all the armour wherein he trusted, opens the prison-doors —and there is an end of Satan's bondage. But there is no end, till life ends, of Satan's endeavours to get you back again into his dungeons. He will disquiet, if he cannot defeat,—he will make inroads, if he cannot carry off his prey,—he will wound, if he cannot slay; and even God's children can track the slime of Satan's crawl upon their hearts as long as those hearts beat to tempt

his entrance. "I acknowledged myself a sinner at threescore," said old Adam of Wintringham, "and now that I am fourscore, I find myself just the same."

SECTION LXVI.

(Chapter xiii. verse 18—21.)

THE progress of Christ's Gospel is here represented under the imagery of a seed sown in a garden, and its various processes of vegetation, till it becomes the large and branching tree, in which the birds of the air can find shelter and safety. That seed when committed to the soil is a very tiny thing, giving no indication nor promise of what is to spring from it, and affording in itself no resemblance to its after production. Nor, though we see it not, does its earlier development afford us much insight into what is about to happen. It swells indeed in the ground, bursts its tiny skin, and puts forth a small and tender radicle, or infant root, which gradually lays hold of the earth with its slender fibres, and then sends upwards a slim and narrow blade, so slight that it would bend beneath the weight of the smallest insect. Yet it grows and grows, and at last, it may be after years of patient waiting, the magnificent tree of the forest or the garden stands displayed in all its beauty and verdure.

The growth of the Gospel is here compared by our Lord to the growth of such a seed. To the disciples indeed, with all their preconceived opinions and prejudices of their Master's immediate assumption of His kingdom, the idea here presented to them could only convey discouragement and disappointment. They had no doubt pictured to themselves, not the slow progress of nature's vegetation, but, if we may so express it, something like the instantaneous creation of Paradise, when the earth, at the command of the Creator, brought forth the grass, and the herb, and the fruit-tree bearing fruit, and yielding seed in full and perfect and complete growth. It was therefore no doubt discouraging and disappointing to them to learn that years of toil and patience, years of faith must pass away ere much progress or growth would ensue; that their Master, themselves, and it might be many a generation afterwards would pass away ere their Lord's words were accomplished. Such we may suppose would be the momentary, and only the momentary feeling of disappointment at their Lord's statement; but what would be the feelings with which we might imagine some of the byestanders to listen to such an unqualified declaration of future increase and success. How would Pharisee or Sadducee, or Scribe, or Priest, or Herodian receive such a prediction from one like Jesus, whom they called in scorn the carpenter's son, and whom they alike rejected because they

knew His earthly parentage, and despised it as mean and lowly. One can well imagine these adversaries, though so lately silenced, still feeling in their hearts something of that contemptuous supercilious scepticism, which the Israelitish lord expressed, when in the very extremity of famine Elisha predicted the morrow's abundance, "If the Lord would make windows in heaven, then might this thing be." O how aptly did His fate prefigure theirs; "He saw it with His eyes, but did not eat thereof;" in the midst of the abundance He perished—and so here Scribes and Pharisees saw the spreading of the Gospel with their eyes, but tasted not of it: in the very midst of mercy they "died without mercy." And yet the tree has grown, and still grows and spreads out its branches. The King of Babylon in the visions of his bed "beheld a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great—the tree grew and waxed strong, and the height thereof reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth—the leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all; the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it." Yet of that tree, fair and flourishing as it was, the holy Watcher from heaven cried aloud, and said, "Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruits:" and though for a season its root and its

stump was left in the earth, it was ere long utterly uprooted and the place thereof knew it no more.

But our Lord here uses another figure by comparing the Gospel increase to leaven in the meal—it is perhaps a more homely simile, but even more significant than the former; and I cannot but think, has an expressive reference to a later season of predicted triumph. The grain of mustard seed was cast into a man's garden, and grew up into a goodly tree—but it had there its boundaries, its fences, and its limits—the leaven leavened *the whole*. It is the nature of leaven to leaven the whole lump; and the knowledge of the Lord, in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is to cover the whole earth, as the waters cover the sea. And though many no doubt, like these "adversaries" of Christ, may sneer contemptuously at the thought, and ask, where is the promise of His coming, yet wherever one turns one's eyes, one sees the heaving of the waves, the barriers, and boundaries, and dykes, and walls of human hindrance and hellish opposition are broken and breaking down—the waters are swelling onwards in a noble volume—and God's people may now indeed make ready to sing the Psalmist's song, "Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein; let the floods clap their hands, let the hills be joyful together before the Lord, for He cometh to judge the earth.

SECTION LXVII.

(Chapter xiii. verse 22—30.)
John 10—22.

THE question which was here proposed to our Lord, and the answer which He gave to it, may be taken in some measure as an illustration of the manner in which prayer is often answered. It is said, 'We ask, and do not receive, because we ask amiss." But, even in such a case, is prayer ever unanswered? I believe it may be unerringly asserted that no prayer of sincerity was ever in vain; like the Word of God, it never returns void, though we must not and dare not add that it will accomplish that whereunto it is sent, that is, that it will obtain the exact thing for which it asks. That is not often, perhaps seldom, the result of prayer—there is too much of erroneous judgment, too much of misguided wishes, perhaps we should say too much of earthly parentage in the prayers of fallible and sinful man; and the Lord is far kinder and more merciful in oftener refusing than in granting our petitions. But though He may not give what we ask, He always gives more than we ask: what He really sends in answer to our prayer is more valuable, and more serviceable, and more consonant with His own high and holy attributes, than what we often so vaguely and indiscriminately ask for. It was so here—there was much that was amiss in the question here proposed to

Jesus—it would have been far more profitable to have asked in the language of one afterwards, 'What must *I* do to be saved?' Whether there were many or few that should be saved could have no bearing on the salvation of him that asked the question. It was in a far different spirit, that one, of whom I have somewhere read, said, "Though there be but ten righteous to be saved, I will seek to be one of those ten." It was a worse than unprofitable curiosity to be seeking to pry into the state of other men's souls: we have enough to do to ascertain the state of our own, and, though God forbid that we should feel no interest and take no pains for another's soul, yet our Lord assuredly here prohibits all vain and idle enquiry as to the salvation of those around us, and intimates the far greater importance of "minding our own business" in this matter, when He bids him that questioned Him to strive to enter in at the strait gate, and adds that solemn and appalling warning, that many, aye many, "will seek to enter in and shall not be able." I believe this passage of Scripture has often made many sad, whom the Lord has not made sad, as if, after all, earnest seeking after eternal life might be disappointed and fall short of its mark. I do not deny that there may be much seeking in a wrong direction, which will miss its road; or much slothful seeking which will not attain the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus: but it would be contrary to God's own

word of promise, "Seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you," to suppose for an instant that one humble seeking soul ever went to Jesus, and was rejected of Him, or ever knocked at the door of mercy in the name of Jesus, and found that door barred against him. I wish to put this matter as strongly as I can, because I have so often found this verse a rock of offence and a stumbling stone to many, who are ready to charge God with unrighteousness in excluding such an one as they suppose here described. "Is God unrighteous?" we may well ask. I will tell you when—I would speak with unfeigned reverence —I will tell you, *when* you may charge God with unrighteousness. And it is, when you can find the being, who has really and in earnest sought the Lord—and has not found Him;—it is when some poor overburdened sinner has gone to Jesus, and laid his burden at the foot of His Saviour's cross —and has been cast out, and bidden to take his burden back;—it is when you can find the man, who has wrestled with God in prayer, and said 'I will not let Thee go, unless Thou bless me,'—and He has *not* blessed him—some poor woman that is a sinner who has washed her Saviour's feet with her tears, and He has *not* said, "Go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee"—some self-convicted, abased publican, who has not dared to lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but has smitten upon his breast, and said, "God be merciful to me a sinner,"—and

He has *not* had mercy on him. Find me such an one in the East, or in the West, in the North, or in the South, in the heights above, or the depths below, and I will then say to you, 'Charge God with unrighteousness,'—but not till then. And yet the words are, "Many will seek to enter in and shall not be able." But at what period are they seeking, at what hour are they thus knocking —we are distinctly told that it is when the door is shut, when the Master and His guests are already entered into the house, and the door is finally closed and made fast against every lagging loiterer, and idle wanderer. It represents the melancholy case of a self-deluded sinner awaking up at the moment of, or after death, and finding that he has no interest in Christ, neither title nor meetness for heaven. It is the fearful case shadowed forth in the parable of the virgins—where there was no admission for the five foolish ones, though they came and knocked, and said, "Lord, Lord, open unto us"—and His answer was then the same as here—"Verily, I say unto you, I know you not—I know you not, whence ye are." Alas! we may well believe what a knocking there will be at heaven's door in that day—from how many a lost soul will that piteous cry be heard, "Lord, Lord, open unto us"—and the inexorable answer to all will be, "I know you not, whence ye are." There is not here, as Archbishop Leighton strikingly observes, a breaking off from former acquaintance—

no, He never does that; He disavows none that were ever truly acquainted with Him—"I *never* knew you—I know you not, whence ye are"—and therefore He justly adds as in St. Matthew's Gospel, "Depart from Me, ye workers of iniquity."

SECTION LXVIII.

(Chapter xiii. verse 31 to the end.)

DAVID, in a time of much calamity and persecution, when his enemies were taking counsel together against him, and devising to take away his life, nevertheless comforted himself by the reflection that "his times were in the Lord's hands," and he therefore prayed to God to deliver him from the hands of his enemies and from them that persecuted him. And so here the Son of David strengthens Himself by a somewhat similar consideration. He had received intimation, probably from some designing motive, of some intended danger on the part of Herod, in whose dominions He was at present; and as Herod had already put John Baptist to death, there might have been cause for alarm, and for precaution. But "my times are in Thy hand," said David. Man may devise and plot, kings and counsellors may rage furiously, but they cannot go beyond the will of the Lord to do good or evil. In the same spirit,

Jesus here refuses to withdraw from or forego His work of love on earth, while time and opportunity remained to Him. There was still work for Him for to day and to-morrow, and the day following—there were devils to be expelled and vanquished, and souls to be won—there were sicknesses to be healed, and sorrows assuaged,—there was still the last message of mercy to infatuated Jerusalem ere her measure of guilt was complete —and then His work on earth would be finished, and for a short season the powers of darkness would appear to prevail. Herod and Pontius Pilate would unite against Him, and might think that in accomplishing His death they had accomplished His ruin. And yet in that very act would His offering be perfected, in the very shedding of His blood would His office of Mediator and Intercessor be sealed and consecrated. Whether our Lord meant any allusion to His resurrection by declaring that "on the third day" He should be perfected, or whether He merely used a not-uncommon phrase to signify simply a short time, I cannot say; yet I think so striking a coincidence of time could hardly have been altogether casual, and that there was in the mind of Jesus a reference to that glorious and not far distant event, when the work of redemption would indeed be perfected by His dying for our sins, and rising again for our justification.

What a sad pre-eminence does Jesus here claim for Jerusalem; making it one of the very reasons

for His security, even from Herod's enmity and violence, that He was not in Jerusalem; that it was, as it were, safer to be in the power and territory of one who sought His life, than in that blood-stained and deeply-guilty city. "It cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem." The Baptist indeed had been beheaded in Galilee—his blood had not flowed in the streets of Jerusalem, nor his crushed body been mangled beneath her stones: but John had not been put to death as a prophet—his offence was that he would have stayed a licentious tyrant and a revengeful woman in their career of sin. And even without his blood, the cup of her iniquities would soon be full to overflowing. Yet I would not have you forget, in the touching tenderness of this cry of the Saviour over that city which He loved so well, that there was still the righteous sentence passed: she was indeed wept over, but yet abandoned—her house was left unto her desolate. And, oh! what a desolation, what a barrenness is that when Jesus has withdrawn and His Spirit no longer strives. And yet in the very midst of wrath there were relentings of mercy, indications of forgiveness—there was, faintly shadowed indeed, but still an intimation of some approaching time, when they would welcome and call Him blessed that should come in the name of the Lord. That time assuredly has never yet come; it came not, when He Himself entered Jerusalem, though they shouted

in His train and did cry the very words—yet though loyalty was on their lips, there was no welcome, no fidelity in their hearts. It came not, after Jesus arose, when they imprisoned His apostles, stoned Stephen, beheaded James, and persecuted all. It came not in the day of their own deep calamity, when Jerusalem was trodden down of the Gentiles; nor has it come yet. But who can doubt that there are purposes of mercy even for that rebellious city, when her warfare shall be accomplished and her iniquity pardoned—when, saith the Lord, "I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall all know me from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and will remember their sin no more."

SECTION LXIX.

(Chapter xiv. verse 1—14.)

THE conduct of our Lord at this pharisee's house is a striking instance of what I before remarked, how Jesus, whose especial meat and drink it was to do His Father's will, never allowed any opportunity to escape Him of rendering these entertainments, to which He was invited, an occasion of

instruction and improvement to those He met. I am afraid that on this, as on other occasions, the invitation was given in no kindly nor hospitable spirit; or it may in this instance have probably been the case, that as some of the wealthier Jews kept a sort of open table for Sabbath-days, this was one of those, and that Jesus availed Himself of it without any special invitation. But be this as it may, as He was under the pharisee's roof, and a guest at his table, common courtesy and hospitality should have precluded his entertainer from rendering his own house a trap to ensnare a guest, or permitting his other visitors to watch Him for the purpose of founding an accusation against Him. I do not for a moment think that such a purpose could be attempted, far less tolerated in our day; I believe there is far too honourable a spirit for any such ungenerous practices; but I fear that something very much akin to it is sometimes permitted, when a guest, whose religious principles are known to be of a higher standard, or who on some important points conscientiously differs from those around, is rendered uncomfortable by being *talked at*, and the very topics on which a known difference exists,—it may be of Sabbath strictness, or of worldly conformity, of races, or balls, or cards,—these are the very topics unkindly brought forward for discussion; if not indeed to ensnare, at least to lay a stumbling-block in a brother's way, or give pain to a sister's

heart. It is not every one who has the moral or the constitutional courage to resist such an aim as this, or to stand up boldly but singly in defence of principles and practices so at variance with those around them. Nor do I think it would be always judicious to accept a challenge so ungenerously as well as unseasonably given. The purposes of social entertainment are not certainly for unkindness or discomfort to any, and however desirable it may be that conversation should be diverted from frivolous and transitory topics to those which are more ennobling and expansive, it should not be at the expence of Christian charity, and I would add of Christian courtesy. I cannot but think that this record of Jesus in the pharisee's house on this Sabbath-day, and of the incidents which passed there, is most significant and instructive. It tells us that Jesus is present, even where we are little apt to realize His presence. It is true He does not sit down with us as a guest, as He did at this pharisee's table, but His spirit is with us, His eye is on us, and He marks even the most trifling acts, or at least those which we think trifling. He notices, as He did here, the unseemly desire for precedence, the offence, and the envy, and the jealousy that rankles in the hearts of many, if those distinctions are not studiously observed. He notices the conduct at the table, and though there may be nothing to the outward eye but what is consistent with all the requirements of the most polished society and the highest

breeding, there may be much in the hidden man, both as to what we eat and what we drink, that may be displeasing to Him, and little consistency with the apostle's rule, that "whether we eat, or whether we drink, we should do all to the glory of God." I think too that if we realize the fact to our own hearts that Jesus is present and hears every word, and that He has distinctly declared that "of every idle word that men shall speak they shall give account," many a prurient jest would be restrained, many an indelicate observation checked, and many a scandal uncirculated. It is a good rule to take with us into every place and every company,—"Thou, God, seest me;" and if we add to it, what is no less true, "Thou, God, hearest me," I do not think we can go very much amiss in our practice or conversation. The Gospel of Jesus Christ requires no sacrifice, no surrender at our hands, but of what is avowedly and undeniably wrong and injurious to ourselves or others. Jesus, when on earth, forbade no social nor festive meeting—He Himself was present at many, and even here, while He found fault with what He saw amiss, He at least sanctions their continuance, for He says to His host, "when thou makest a dinner or a supper"—and to the guests, "when thou art bidden to a wedding." It is no unsocial feeling which the Saviour would inculcate—He sets no seal of Gospel truth or sanction on moroseness, or churlishness, or suppression of social ties—but He would

throw a Christian spirit over all, He would infuse higher motives and nobler ends, and whatsoever we do, He would bid us "do all to the glory of God."

SECTION LXX.

(Chapter xiv. verse 15—24.)
Matt. xxii. 1—14.

THIS parable of the supper is delivered by Jesus at the house of that pharisee at whose table He was sitting as a guest. It was suggested by a remark from one of the other guests, who, struck by our Lord's delineation of a feast that gathered in the poor and the maimed, the lame and the blind, those that needed aid and could in no degree repay save by their thanks and their prayers, had exclaimed, as he listened to these things, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God." It is probable that this guest had no very clear views of what the Kingdom of God meant—and yet as he was remarking on a feast at which those were to be assembled whom society would too commonly exclude as outcasts, and as it was to such a gathering he alluded, when he inferred that "Blessed are they that share in such;" I cannot think that this remark was made in any scornful, captious, or even carnal spirit. It could assuredly be no worldly spirit, however defective his views

otherwise might have been, that could speak of the blessedness of the man, who should thus eat bread with the despised beggar, or the crippled mendicant. He could have no very carnal views of that kingdom, when he declared that man a happy one, be he beggar, or cripple, or blind, or whosoever he might be, that should be admitted as an inmate and a guest there.

It is a striking contrast which our Lord here draws between the Gospel feast and a worldly one; and yet probably in eastern climes, where hospitality is so great a virtue, and where it was not uncommon to distribute at least the remainder of a feast among the poor and needy, something like such a scene as is here described might have been occasionally witnessed, though one seems to associate the gathering of such a company in a lordly or a royal mansion or even at the gates of an abbey with purposes of ostentation rather than humanity, with pride more than humility, with haughty condescension that gratifies itself rather than the genuine benevolence that waits on feeble helplessness or tottering age. And if such the contrast, how comprehensive the love that sought such a company, that disdained not to spread its prepared feast before them from whom man would have turned aside. What a joyous sound must have thrilled through every grateful heart, as they heard the Gospel call, "Ho! every one that thirsteth, ye that have no money, come

without money." "Bring in hither the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind." And from that hour blessed be God they have been flocking in—the degraded thief, the blinded sinner, the blaspheming priest, the unclean Gentile, the heathen idolater, all alike washed and sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. They have been flocking in at the Gospel call like doves to the windows from distant isles and benighted races—a goodly company has the Lord got together from every lazar-house of sin and suffering in every nation under heaven—and we might perhaps fear that, as in the marriage supper of the King's Son, "the wedding is already furnished with guests"—that the bridegroom has entered in, and the door closed against other comers—but oh no—"yet there is room"—yet there is welcome.

> "Ye perishing and guilty, come
> At Jesus' feast there yet is room.
> * * * * *
> Let whosoever will, now come,
> In mercy's heart there still is room"

"In My Father's house are many mansions." As there is bread, so is there room enough and to spare. "Go out quickly." But are "the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind" only admitted? It is even so—the "poor, and the miserable, and the blind, and the naked" are the only welcome ones: but the earth's rich ones, and the earth's mighty ones are not shut out, for they too

are among those that are needy and perishing. If they think themselves rich, and as having need of nothing, they too will refuse the invitation and keep away from the feast—if they go as poor sinners, they will undoubtedly be welcome.

I would just say one word on that phrase of our Lord, "*Compel* them to come in." Persecution must be hard put to it, when it can find in that precious word of love a sanction for its own cruelties. Does not love compel—"the love of Christ constrain?" Does not love subdue? Is there no such thing as being "drawn with cords of man, with bands of love?" Is not love strong as death? so that "many waters cannot quench it, neither can the floods drown it; and if a man were to give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly contemned." Even to take the words literally, it is a sweet word to take with one, and plead before God in prayer. When love is weak, as, alas! it sometimes will be—when human love and human affections dim it,—when the heart is chilled, and the steps feeble, and the eye turning aside, if not backward—to cry out, "Lord, compel me to come in,—keep me in *Thy* way,—hedge up *my* way with thorns—by Thine uplifted hand, by Thine outstretched arm—by suffering, or sorrow, or sickness, or trial, compel me to come in," and keep in. Depend upon it, this is a sweet prayer, and often very sweetly answered.

SECTION LXXI.

(Chapter xiv. verse 25 to the end.)

THE expression here used by Jesus of "hating" father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, in fact all that is dear and valuable for His sake, is apparently a very strong one, and might cause some to be offended at a saying, which went to break down and tear asunder all the closest and dearest ties that can unite heart to heart. But we may be assured that there is no inconsistency, that there can be no contradiction in the Word of God, and that He who once said, 'For this cause shall a man leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh,' never intended that any man should hate his wife. And He too who said, "Honour thy father and thy mother," never intended that such a feeling as hatred or animosity should exist in a child's heart towards his father, or his mother. It is evident therefore that we must apply some other meaning to the word 'hate' in this passage—and happily the Gospel of St. Matthew affords the clue, where the parallel passage is, "Whoso loveth father or mother *more than Me*;" and "to hate" was a frequent Hebrew idiom to signify "loving less," and in this sense it is a most important and valuable precept that no earthly ties however dear, no human attachment however close and intimate,

should be allowed, in any Christian's heart, to usurp that paramount place in our affections which belongs first and foremost to God. It seems to intimate that as all human relationships are from God, and as every tie, and every affection which can endear life, and render our passage through the wilderness a source of blessing and enjoyment, are especially His gift, so they should in no sense nor degree supersede the Giver.

No doubt among those "great multitudes," who were then following Jesus, there must have been many whose views were altogther worldly and selfish, and who sought Him, as He Himself said, "because of the loaves." Many too there were, we might well believe, who were deeply interested in His discourses, touched by His appeals and convinced by His miracles that He was indeed a teacher sent from God, and who were ready to say in real unaffected sincerity, "Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." Many there might be, and no doubt were like him, who desired to follow Jesus, but not now, and who wished to wait till home's ties and home's affections less interfered with his purpose. It was therefore with peculiar application to one and all of these, that our Lord here lifted up as it were the veil, and shewed what it meant and what it involved to be His disciple. But does it demand the same sacrifice still? Are we each called upon to the same surrender, to the same cross—to the same expen-

diture, and the same peril. No doubt there was an especial cross to be borne in those earliest days of discipleship; but the offence of the cross is assuredly not ceased—nor has what has been strikingly called the world's trinity, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" in any degree diminished its power or attraction. We are still apt to make idols even of our natural affections, and to render what is in itself innocent, sinful, in our excess. There is still, no doubt, with every sincere disciple, a vast amount of cost to be reckoned up—much that must be parted with; nay, in one sense, our Lord describes the kingdom of heaven as a pearl of great price, for the possession of which a man parted with *all* he had. It was a vast deal that Paul had to surrender, and long before he could declare of all he gave up, that it was but as dung in comparison with the gain of Christ. He had to give up his worldly prospects, and reputation among men, his comfort, ease, and security, and what was far harder than all, his own righteousness, which was of the law, so deeply imbedded in a Jewish heart.

There is too an arduous warfare, in which every disciple must be engaged—he is enlisted as a soldier from the first, and as a good soldier of Jesus Christ he must "endure hardness"—"troubled on every side, fightings without and fears within." An enemy who, though daily defeated, daily renews the fight—a triple band, the world, the flesh,

and the devil. The world *may* lose its power, the flesh *must*, but the devil never will—his enmity is to the very last and *at the very last*. It is therefore in much tenderness as well as wisdom that Jesus here cautions those that would follow Him to count the peril and the cost. He would have no follower engage with Him in ignorance, or at unawares. Like Moses, He sets before them life or death; like Joshua, He bids them choose whom they will serve; like Elijah, He proclaims, "If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him." But at the same time, without reserve or compromise, He adds, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all he hath, he cannot be my disciple." It is a striking illustration which our Lord here gives of the inconsistent disciple, comparing him to salt which has lost its savour, and was consequently useless. "Love not the world, nor the things of the world" is the badge of Christ's disciples. "No man that warreth," saith St. Paul, "entangleth himself with the affairs of his life." And still more fearfully does St Peter impress the same truth, that "If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning," like salt which had lost its savour, and though it might look white and sparkling to

the eye, was fit only to be cast out, and no more to be used in the sacrifices of their temple service.

SECTION LXXII.

(Chapter xv. verse 1—7.)

We are now commencing a series of the most exquisitely beautiful and touching parables representing in the most inimitable characters the Lord's tenderness and yearning love over poor lost and straying sinners. They seem, as it were, to lift up the veil that hides heaven from our sight, disclosing to our view its pure and holy inmates deriving, even amid all the joys at God's right hand for evermore, an added joy at the bringing back of every reclaimed and forgiven sinner. The man who is represented as having lost one of his sheep is evidently our Lord Jesus Christ, the good Shepherd, willing to lay down His life for the sheep, and equally ready to encounter every labour and suffering in order to recover though but one that had strayed away from the fold. It has indeed been suggested by many a pious commentator, that the case here represented is that of lost man—not one here and there—not one in a hundred—but all, the whole human race, as lost, and in themselves irrecoverably ruined—that the Shepherd is

Jesus, taking upon Him our nature, and coming into this world to seek and to save that which was lost, while He leaves the angels in heaven, represented by the ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance, in perfect safety and security. And when He has accomplished His mighty work, and wrought out an everlasting salvation for redeemed sinners, then He returns home, He reascends to heaven, and calling the heavenly host around bids them rejoice with Him over the redemption He had won and purchased for a perishing world. Now I do not deny that there is great beauty, nay more, great truth, in the exposition here suggested—that it accurately adapts itself to most of the incidents of the case, and obviates at least the difficulty, which I suspect first gave rise to the explanation. But I cannot believe that this was the mind of our Lord in this most exquisite parable, that He meant to shadow forth even the mighty truth of man's redemption—not merely because I think it destroys far greater beauty, and lessens the far more touching interest and sympathy displayed by the loving Saviour in His deep anxiety for *one*—but because I cannot consent to forego the sweet conviction which this parable so brings home to my heart, that in this lost and wandering sheep Jesus sought me,—sought and seeks each one of you, and will continue to seek every wanderer to the end of time. There is too one little word, which seems to me so out of cha-

racter with the explanation alluded to, that if that were alone, it would have been in my estimation decisive on this point. "Doth He not leave the ninety and nine in the *wilderness?*" Is heaven a wilderness? Would Jesus describe His Father's house and His own abode under such an image? Are the blessed angels round about the throne of God remaining in a wilderness? Can that be said of the home where God dwelleth; of that land afar off, where they behold the King in His beauty? *All* of earth is a wilderness—*none* of heaven can be. Even earth's places of safety and pasture are still a wilderness, and if for a season a home, it is but the home of the exile, singing the Lord's song in a strange land.

Who then are these ninety and nine blessed ones that need no repentance? Assuredly none on earth, if we take repentance as involving sin, for there is not one that sinneth not. But they are Christ's little flock, and in one sense, they need, they exercise no repentance. The word here used for repentance is change of mind, change of purpose, of determination, as well as sorrow for sin, it is the very word used by the Apostle when he speaks of Isaac's not changing his purpose in blessing Jacob rather than Esau; and may we not say of every one of Christ's little flock, that they need, nay wish no repentance, that they have cast into the Lord's treasury all their heart's best affections, that their dearest and best hopes are fixed above, where

Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, and that their life is hid with Christ in God. Do these repent of their choice? need they repentance here? Having tasted of the heavenly gift, and feeding in the green pastures of the Word of God, and by the still waters of the peace of God, do they desire to go back and walk no more with Him? The good Shepherd knoweth them that are His, and He has pledged Himself that they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of His hand. He therefore leaveth them in safety, they are fenced in by all the attributes and promises of Jehovah, and none can hurt nor destroy in all His holy mountain; and He goeth after the one that has strayed. Far many more than one, alas! have wandered away—but He seeketh each, and with as much tenderness, and patience, and yearning of heart, as if it were the only loved one, the only one sorrowed for and sought. And whither does He not seek him, whither does He not go, if peradventure He may find and lead him home?

> "The Shepherd sought His sheep,
> The Father sought His child;
> They followed me o'er vale and hill,
> O'er desert, waste and wild."

And when He hath found him, then indeed seeth He of the travail of His soul, and is satisfied—and He once more exclaims, "Of them that Thou gavest Me, have I lost none." And though

wounded, and bruised, and torn, and nigh to death, "He layeth it on His shoulders," or as the prophet more touchingly describes it, "He gathers them in His arms, and carries them in His bosom," and once more restores him to the fold he had so foolishly and unwisely left, and bids the "ninety and nine" whom He had left there, rejoice over a brother lost and found, over a son dead and alive again. There may be here and there one, even in the Lord's family, who at first grudges the love as unworthily bestowed, as we shall find in a later parable; but what are the feelings *of* heaven and *in* heaven? There those pure and holy spirits send forth a louder and more joyous strain of glory to Him who has snatched another brand from the burning, who has added another jewel to His crown.

SECTION LXXIII.

(Chapter xv. verse 8—10.)

THERE is such great similarity between this parable and the last one of the shepherd seeking his strayed and lost sheep, that you might almost think the remarks on the one equally applicable to the other. And so indeed in a great measure they are—but there are yet some few particulars, some little minutiæ, which seem designed to attract our

especial attention. Here it describes a woman having lost one piece of money from her store, and making every effort and exertion to find it, lighting a candle that no dark corners may escape her search, no chink, no crevice pass unexamined, sweeping the house in every part, sifting the very dust, and seeking diligently and untiringly till her search is rewarded by the recovery of the lost piece of money. What an idea does all this give of the worth and value of a human soul in the sight of God, that He represents Himself as taking all this care, all these pains for the recovery even of one soul. And yet to look at man's treatment of his own soul, one would imagine it the most worthless possession that he had—or at least so comparatively insignificant that any or every other object of time or sense exceeded it in value, or at any rate so easily kept in order, demanding so little watchfulness, requiring such scanty pains, that one day in seven, or it may be one day in seven years, and in some instances one day in seventy years, and that the last day, the day of death, is all that is wanted to set every thing to rights. Surely such an one is not described under the character either of the shepherd or of the woman, as taking these pains either for his own or his neighbour's soul. And yet it is an awful question, which our Lord asks in another place, "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" and lays it down as an undoubted truth, that were the whole world the

purchase-money for one soul it would be a miserable, short sighted bargain.

In the former parable it was the shepherd seeking the sheep that had strayed. It is remarked of the sheep that it never, of itself, finds its way back to the fold or the flock—it strays onwards and onwards, every day sees it farther and farther off from the fold; and unless sought for, it would never return, so that in those countries of mountain-pastures, and extensive wildernesses, without hedge-rows, or bounds, or walls, the shepherd himself might have to wander afar ere he could find the sheep he had lost. And does not our Lord say that He has other sheep to be brought in, that are far off, that are not yet of His fold, but still elect, chosen of God and precious, whom He must go after and seek and find? and who, when, yea as soon as, they hear His voice, will know it to be the voice of love calling them to safety as well as abundance, and they will turn, and He will bring them in, and there shall be one fold, one shepherd. It is a touching representation of the missionary Spirit of Jesus, of that Spirit which left as His last command, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature," and which describes Himself as bringing home on His shoulders or in His bosom some benighted ones from those far-distant lands, whom we perhaps look down upon as the degraded and the lowest in the scale of our races of man.

But the Lord knew that we had each of us a fold of our own to watch over, a vineyard of our own to cultivate, a household of our own to look after, and even the most solitary a soul of his own to save. We may not all have duties in the wilderness, but we have all duties in the house: and this domestic parable, if I may so call it, comes especially home to our own cases. The first lesson it teaches you is, that the piece of money is lost to begin with. It does not tell you merely to be careful and vigilant, lest it should get lost, but it is actually lost at the very outset, and so it is with every one of us. "In Adam all die"—"The Scripture hath concluded all under sin"—"There is no difference; all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." "The heart is desperately wicked," and to search into all the dark "chambers of its imagery," will require not only a keen and quick sight, but a strong light, the light of the Word of God: and even then to search diligently, and above all let me add to begin betimes to seek. There is an especial promise to encourage such, "They that seek me early, shall find me." And, depend upon it, though even in the morning of life it will require all your carefulness, and all your prayerfulness and fidelity; yet the labour and the pains and the difficulty will be a thousand fold encreased, when all the accumulated soil and dirt and stains of a whole life have to be rooted out. How much of grief does earth's sin cause in hea-

ven! over how many a one is the heart of Jesus now yearning in tenderest compassion! to how many a wandering one is not His Father crying out, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" Over how much is not the Holy Spirit "grieving?" Are not the angels, those ministers of His that do His will, continually bearing, though unseen, messages of love and mercy to sinner's souls, and watching with intensest interest, if they can but hasten back to heaven, with the tidings, "Behold he prayeth." And shall we not give one joy to those that dwell there—shall there be joy or sorrow on our account in heaven—shall Jesus look down on us, as He looked upon Jerusalem, and say, "Behold your house is left unto you desolate"—or shall He turn to those around His throne, and say of each one of us, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece I had lost?"

SECTION LXXIV.

(Chapter xv. verse 11—14.)

THERE is something inimitably touching in this parable of the prodigal son—it so comes home to almost every one's case. Few can read it without arousing a Nathan in his own conscience to cry aloud "Thou art the man;" for in reality the prodigal son is lost man—he is the representative

of every child of Adam's family: and in some respects he is in the same condition as the stray sheep or the piece of money in the preceding parable—he too has strayed from the fold, from his father's house, and he too is lost. But under what circumstances of aggravation and ingratitude does he quit the security and shelter of his father's house—with what selfish recklessness does he spurn the home of his childhood and youth for what he deems the uncontrouled indulgence of his own passions. The father is first brought before us as having two sons—it is with the younger we have now to do. The elder son, alas! as we shall see, is not without sin or unkindness, or free from envy and repining—and which of God's children can say, "God, I thank Thee I am not as other men?" Not one—*all* have sinned, even those that are safe under their Father's eye and guidance, those that have been ever with Him, that have never sought, never wished for other pleasures, other companions than those under their Father's roof. But we must not forestall. The two sons represent the two great classes of mankind: there are but two, however they may be subdivided; the godly and the ungodly; those who serve God, and those who serve Him not. And so it is here: the younger son is wearied of the regularity and discipline of of his father's home, and longs to be away from the control and beyond the reach of a father's eye. The very means he takes to effect his purpose shew

the selfish ingratitude of his heart, as well as his impatient and unfilial eagerness to be his own master. He addresses indeed his father with the honoured title of "Father," but might not he have answered as another Father represents Himself as saying, "If I be a Father, where is Mine honour?" How abrupt the proposition, as well as irreverent the manner! "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." He claims it as his own, he demands it as a debt due, as a right owing to him. "Give me that that belongeth to me." Was not all his father's? was it not of his father's free love that he had any portion—was not the peace and plenty and safety of his father's house sufficient for him? Had he any unkindness of which to accuse that father's treatment?—any harshness, any partiality towards his elder brother over himself? could he say as Jacob said of Laban that "his countenance was not towards him as before." There was nothing of the kind alleged—nothing of the kind existing. His father might have answered in the Lord's own touching words, "Oh My people! Oh my son! what have I done unto thee, or wherein have I grieved thee? testify against me." How truly does all this represent man; how little does he think that all he has is God's, and claims it as his own; how little does he regard the Lord's bounties as loans, and murmur at their recall! We know well enough what was in this young man's heart, even before, and

when he had made his demands, by what he actually does almost as soon as he receives his father's kindness. He asked it but to enable him to withdraw from that father's home and counsels, and from the irksome restraints of a godly household. It is not necessary to suppose that he had any intention of leading the life he did, or dissipating the property he had received in the haste he did. He thought no doubt too well of himself and of his own management and his own prudence to fear any such thing. He was old enough to take care of himself, and he would seek happiness where his own heart and feelings assured him it could best be found. But did his purpose answer? did he find his own guidance sufficient to direct, his own resolution enough to restrain him? Had he at all guessed at the depth of sin that was in his heart, or the utter infirmity of purpose that would beset him? He set out indeed buoyant enough in his own conceit, and thought the farther he was from home, the freer he would be from restraint, and the less likely to be thwarted in his course or have his actions reported at home. So he gathers all he had together, and took his journey into a far country—afar from the counsels, the prayers and the blessings of a godly home. The result was such as might have been predicted: left to his own guidance and his own discretion, he was soon exposed to a most dangerous downfal, and quickly enticed into "all the wretchlessness of unclean

living." "The lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life" were soon too strong for a graceless heart. With the example he lost the practice of prayer, and ungodly companions soon laughed away the compunctious visitings of shame. Alas! how striking the representation of man's falling away from God! at the very time of the Lord's most abundant mercies: "as they were increased, so they sinned against me;" or as the same prophet says, "According to their pastures so were they filled, therefore have they forgotten me." But the Lord in His loving kindness has not forgotten them. This poor prodigal began to be in want, and that which he looked upon as the greatest of hardships was in reality the first indication of mercy. Had he known no want, he had felt no desire to return: it was his want, and his sense of that want that led him to reflect on the guilty past. And the famine that desolated the land was God's messenger of love and mercy to this poor prodigal.

We shall see to-morrow how he dealt with the message.

SECTION LXXV.

(Chapter xv. verses 15, 16.)

We left the poor prodigal yesterday in the commencement of his misery. He had begun to be

in want. He had begun to find that even the accomplishment of one's own wishes, and the fulfilment of one's own desires, does not bring with it that satisfaction which was at first anticipated. There is something still wanting, some void to be still filled up, some craving to be satisfied; and of all pursuits, the pursuit of pleasure is the soonest over: it palls the soonest upon the appetite, the "full soul loathes even the honey-comb." "Riotous living" soon brings both purse and constitution to a stand-still—and there never perhaps was a human proverb, on which God has so legibly written 'folly and madness,' as on that saying so common among the dissolute and the prodigal, 'A short life and a merry one.' Short enough, God knows it often is, shortened by their own courses; and as to its mirth, it is as short-lived too; and one, who knew it well, accurately described it when he likened it to the crackling of fire among the thorns, and said of laughter, 'It is mad,' and of mirth, 'What doeth it?' 'A short life and a merry one,' should be read, 'A long eternity and a miserable one.'

This poor prodigal had begun to be in want. A sore famine had arisen in addition to his own dilapidated fortunes, and he was soon reduced even to destitution. A famine probably had never entered his thoughts when he was revolving in his own mind the pleasures he anticipated in that distant land to which he had bent his steps. So the sin-

ner in forsaking God, thinks not of the thousand accidents that may occur to overthrow all his schemes of enjoyment. He never dreams of the storm that may darken the brightest sky—he thinks not of sickness nor of death, and has no idea that even riches can make themselves wings and flee away, and leave him in the destitute condition of this poor prodigal. He never suspects, at the outset, that prop after prop, upon which he has rested his hopes of this world's happiness, may be withdrawn from beneath him, or become, like the reed of Egypt, the very instrument, which pierces his hand, and destroys his fabric of earthly bliss. But misery *has* come upon this poor prodigal—want has overtaken him—'his sin has found him out,' and something must be done. One would think that the first thought of his heart would have been of that distant home, which he had so rashly left, that the first step would have been towards that home and the friends who loved him there. No doubt thoughts arose in his heart, and vain regrets that he had ever left that home, and it may be, even wishes that he were once more safe beneath its roof. But no—every feeling revolted against such a purpose—pride, shame, vexation at his folly all combined to keep him back from the only resource that could meet his case. If he did return, he would not return as a beggar, a miserable needy mendicant craving alms—he would wait till he had by his own industry and resolution in some

degree restored his fallen fortunes, and could claim merit at his father's hands for the efforts he had made. But the famine forestalled all his purposes, closed every avenue, and mocked all his hopes: and so this proud prodigal who had so imperiously said to his father, "Father, give me the portion of goods that belongeth to me," now hires himself as the lowest menial in the basest occupation of a swine-herd. And such is God's complaint both of Israel and of Judah, "When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb"—any thing and any one rather than God,—but as the prophet adds, "yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound."

Alas! we may well ask, why should it be thus? where should the sinner betake himself but to a God of mercy? But this poor prodigal had not yet thought of his father as a forgiving father, nor was his heart in any degree softened towards that father by any penitential sense of his own sin and folly. He was angry with himself but not penitent—angry even with God, and God's dealings with him. He therefore plunges deeper into misery and destitution, and becomes the hired servant of one whose wages supply not even a sufficiency of food. The sinner, in like manner, though he feels the misery to which his sin has reduced him, yet at first is only hardened against God. He either distrusts His power to help him, or His will to

do so: he knows that God must be offended with him, and he therefore for a time hardens himself in his sin, and becomes still more closely the servant of Satan, who puts him to the vilest work, degrades him to the lowest service, and whose only wages is death. Yet it is through the very ways and means of misery that mercy at length reaches the unhappy sinner—the very sufferings he resents, the very pricks he kicks at, the very trials which strip him naked, the famine which starves him, are all ingredients of that parental discipline, which is to restore him to his father's home. "Therefore behold, saith the Lord, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her."

SECTION LXXVI.

(Chapter xv. verse 17—24.)

When we parted with this poor prodigal yesterday, the Lord, you remember, had "allured him into the wilderness" in order that "He might speak comfortably unto him." Humanly speaking, he was in the lowest depths of misery and destitution—"no man gave unto him"—"no man cared for his soul"—"all passed by on the other side;" and he who had hired him, when no doubt in the bitterness of his heart he poured out his com-

plaints, said, as was said to another miserable wretch, "What is that to us? see thou to that." We ourselves no doubt see it continually, and I believe it to be God's most righteous retribution—nay, I would rather say, the Lord's most gracious dealing that it should be so—but still, it is most true, that of all who turn aside from a sinner in his misery and ruin, the speediest and the unkindest, the most callous and indifferent are those who share the sin and contribute to the ruin. The Samaritan and the stranger has stopped in pity and in love, and poured in oil and consolation into the broken and wounded heart of many a brother and a sister in their misery, while the seducer and the companion has turned away with a flippant answer, an unfeeling jest, or a still more cruel suggestion.

This was now the turning point with this poor prodigal: he begins to reflect. In the midst of his riotous living he had no time nor care for reflection, and he put it far away from him. In the beginning of his want, his thoughts were chiefly occupied with plans and purposes of extrication from his misery—but now, in the very extremity of suffering, brought to the lowest ebb of degradation and shame, he comes to himself. The first step in repentance is the sinner's sense of his lost condition, of the misery to which sin has reduced him—of the privileges and comforts of which it has deprived him. And so this poor prodigal in his misery and solitude suffers his thoughts to return

to that home of his childhood and youth, which he had so thoughtlessly quitted. These would indeed be the natural thoughts of a child's heart, but they are not the natural thoughts of the sinner's heart: there must be One to put such thoughts into his heart: he has no power of himself to think them, far less to cherish and to ripen them. There must be one to go after and seek him, or, like the poor sheep that had strayed, he would never return to the fold he had left. And this is the very work of the Holy Spirit to convince sinners of their sin—this is the very work of Jesus to go after the sheep which was lost, till He finds it; to lead poor erring man back again to the home from which he had wandered. It is the very promise of God by His prophet, "I am sought of them that asked not for Me, I am found of them that sought Me not." The prodigal indeed is here represented as doing that of himself and his own suggestion, which was in reality the work of the Holy Spirit, and we see the process by which He wrought on his heart. It is, first, the sense of his own lost condition, "I perish"—he then contrasts his own hungering and starving condition, and the plenty of his father's household, where there was bread enough and to spare—where even the hired servants lived in peace and plenty—and himself, now equally an hired servant with them, but to a far different master, was left to perish. This is followed by the resolution, "I will return to my father's house." No

half measures—no sending, as it were, a message or a letter to bespeak forgiveness and smooth his way—no waiting till he could at least exchange his rags for some more seemly garments—no thoughts of the long and toilsome journey, the sneer of the passing traveller, the repulse on the road, the weary miles for his shoeless feet, "Just as I am—just as I am." There was home at the end—there was a father's heart at the last: and though unworthy to resume his former place either in that house or heart, yet content to become a servant, where he had once been a son, "a door-keeper at the house of his father, rather than dwell any longer in the tents of ungodliness." Such was the resolution, and such the instant carrying out his purpose. "He arose and went to his father." I can well imagine what a child's feelings would be on hearing this parable for the first time—with what intense interest he would, as it were, set out with this poor prodigal on his return homewards and accompany him every step of his journey—how often he would ask himself, "Will his father forgive him, will he receive him—will he not be very angry at first, and perhaps for a time forbid him his presence; or at any rate will he not upbraid him with his ingratitude and sin, and tell him he has justly brought this ruin on himself?" And as he drew nearer to that father's house has not his heart beaten and throbbed, when he saw the poor prodigal, not daring so much as to lift up his eyes

at the well-known signs and tracks of his childhood's home: and repeating over and over again the confession of humiliation, and sorrow, and shame he had determined to adopt. But, oh! what an immeasurable advance from the joy of angels on the recovery of the lost sinner to that of the God of angels: it is no longer the heavenly host rejoicing, it is God Himself, with all the fulness of a Father's love, seeing His child yet afar off, and in his very attitude, in his very rags recognizing all that was passing in that child's broken and contrite heart, runs forward to meet him, falls upon his neck and kisses him. "I will heal his backsliding, I will love him freely, for Mine anger is turned away from him."

SECTION LXXVII.

(Chapter xv. verse 25 to the end.)

We come now to the conduct of the elder son on his brother's return, and the kind reception and forgiveness of him by his father. The parable would have been complete as to its main purport, viz., God's earnest love and pity for poor sinners, His unwearied seeking after them, and His free forgiveness and acceptance of their contrition; and one almost seems to feel as if this latter portion were an excrescence we could well spare. I do

not doubt that there are many hearts on which this episode of the elder brother has grated painfully; nor can I deny that there is much both in his manner and his language which seems strangely at variance with one who had never at any time transgressed his father's commandment, and now rudely sat in judgment on that father's conduct, and much that is inconsistent with that filial reverence which one would have expected from such a son. Alas! alas! for human nature! I would say, let him that is without sin first take up the stone to cast at him—let him that has never repined nor murmured in thought or word at any of the Lord's passings by of himself, nor felt, it may be but a momentary envy when another has "stepped in before him," join in holy indignation against this elder brother. Let him who has never charged God foolishly for His mercies to others, as if, because where sin abounded, grace did much more abound, a licence was therefore given to sin, because we are no longer under the law, but under grace, find fault with the mercy of God to this representation of a fallen sinner. But who is this "elder brother?" Is it the Jew murmuring at the admission of the Gentiles? Assuredly not. There never was a period in the history of Israel in which Israel or Judah could have said to God, "I have never at any time transgressed Thy commandment," nor could God have replied to Israel, "Son, thou art ever with me," for Israel has long

been as a branch broken off because of unbelief. Is then the elder brother the representative of God's angels in heaven, who have never sinned, who have kept their first estate, and of whom God might truly say, "They are ever with me?" I cannot believe this—I cannot believe that those angels, of whom it was said in the preceding parables, that they rejoiced over every returning sinner, that so dear, so precious beyond all price was a human soul, that even one sinner reclaimed made heaven's courts ring with joy,—I cannot, I say, believe that these ministering spirits would ever be represented as grudging and finding fault with a Father's forgiveness to an erring but repentant child. Or, that while the Father tenderly threw a veil over his son's misconduct, and "upbraided not;" or, in His own touching language, "had cast his iniquities into the depths of the sea, and remembered them no more, they would, almost malevolently, take a pleasure in enumerating and exaggerating every transgression. I believe this elder brother to be a type of many a one even in the Lord's family. There are indeed spots that are not the spots of God's children, but there is not one even of them free from spot or blemish, nor will they be, till that day when they shall be "found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless." They too mourn over the "like passions" with other men, and as was once quaintly but truly said, find "old Adam too hard for young

Melancthon;" and there are times and seasons when they too "speak unadvisedly with their lips." And is there not, even in good and holy men, a jealous, I will not say an envious, unwillingness and slowness to believe the genuineness of conversion in one who has been a notorious sinner. Was it not so in the case of Saul? The Lord Himself appeared to Ananias in a vision, and announced the conversion of the persecutor; but, at the moment when angels in heaven were rejoicing over the sinner converted from the error of his ways and from a vessel of wrath become "a chosen vessel unto God," the good and pious Ananias doubted the fact, and enumerated his former misdeeds against Him: and even long after this, when he essayed to join himself to the disciples, they "were afraid of him, and would not believe that he was a disciple."

I think something of this feeling of the elder brother was shadowed out by our Lord in His parable of the householder, when the earlier labourers, who had borne the burden and heat of the day, who had done their master's work in his vineyard, and had not at any time transgressed his commands nor quitted his service, not only were surprized, but even murmured, like the son here, at the kindness that admitted the later comers to an equal share and privilege with themselves. It may not be that we are inclined or disposed to follow exactly in the track of this elder brother, but I would guard

you against the indulgence or even the admission of any unkind or depreciating thought of another. I believe it is Chalmers, who somewhere says, "I think it wrong to nourish contempt for any human being. 'Honour *all* men,' is the precept of Scripture, nor should we despise any of those for whom Christ died." And he adds that "the tendency to do so is one of those temptations to which refinement and knowledge are apt to expose us, and which ought to be resisted."

SECTION LXXVIII.

(Chapter xvi. verse 1—8.)

THIS parable of the unjust steward has been a stumbling-block in the way of many who have read it. And the difficulty is this, the steward is all along represented as a man of dishonest character and practice, and yet he is commended: "The Lord commended the unjust steward." It may indeed be said that it is not Christ who commends him, but his lord, his master, and employer. But even if this be correct, it in no degree meets the difficulty; for the words are Christ's, the parable is Christ's, though the language be put into the mouth of another; and we must therefore, I think, to all intents and purposes consider Christ Himself as uttering and meaning

this commendation. Let us here examine it more accurately, and see what it is that our Lord does really "commend." There can be no question as to the dishonesty or fraudulent practices of this steward,—he is actually dismissed for his dishonesty and mismanagement of his master's estate, —he is expressly called "the unjust steward," and so ingrained is he in injustice, that his very dismissal, instead of awakening him to a sense of former misconduct, only sets him at work to find out a new device, by which he may retrieve what he perhaps called his misfortune, and his master's hasty harshness. And certainly the plan which suggested itself to his mind, and which he appears to have carried out, was a most ingenious one for his purpose. It was not merely a relief to the tenants of his master's land for this year only; it was not simply a gift to the extent of 500 gallons of oil to one, or nearly 200 bushels of wheat to another, and gratitude for which might soon pass away, and be forgotten, but it would seem that he tampered with what we may call his master's leases to these tenants, and reduced the annual payment they had covenanted to make. Ingenious, however, as his device was, it appears to have reached his master's ears, who, on detecting the fraud, expressed admiration at the ingenuity which had thus sought to make provision for a time of need. It is not said that he approved the act, or commended the dishonesty, but simply that he

praised his prudence, his forethought, his worldly wisdom, his providing against a day of want. I do not see more in the commendation expressed here, than what is often used among ourselves, when we speak of one as a shrewd or clever rogue—a commendation perfectly compatible with indignation at the fraud, and disapproval of the sin. But the point to which our attention is most directed is the moral which our Lord deduces from it. The inference He draws is this, that "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." Jesus had now, as it were, parted with the story; He was not contrasting the actions of a child of God with those of this steward in particular, and setting the simplicity and unworldly spirit of the one in an unfavourable light as compared with the shrewdness and duplicity of the other, but He lays it down as a general rule that men of the world exercise far greater activity, perseverance, and clear-sightedness in their worldly business and the attainment of their worldly ends, than are brought to bear on the business and work of a man's soul, and the saving of that soul. And is it not so? Do we not see it every day? Do we not reason from it as a fact, do we not continually urge the persevering industry and untiring energy of man in worldly matters as a pattern and incentive to stir up his sluggish inactivity and indifference to spiritual and heavenly things. Just look for a moment at this steward: his Lord has come

to reckon with him—"Give an account of thy stewardship." Most likely he had never reckoned on a day of reckoning: his master had perhaps gone into a far country—or he had so implicitly confided in his integrity that he had no mistrust, no misgivings about him, till the intelligence of his dishonesty at length reaches his ears. The result is his dismissal, as soon as he has made up his accounts—given in an account of his stewardship—and it is this interval, this respite, if we may so call it, which he so improves and takes advantage of for his future provision and well-being. He reasons accurately and calmly enough on the past and the future—he indulges in no flattering hopes that his master may relent, and re-instate him in his office—he trusts to no chapter of accidents, that something may turn up to befriend him, and that things will not be so bad as he fears—he sees clearly the emergency of his case—what is he to do? He cannot dig, that is, he had no inclination for a life of drudgery as a labourer,* and a life of mendicancy and beggary his pride would not submit to if it could be avoided—and he therefore at once takes the steps mentioned, dishonest ones indeed, but still, as he hoped, effectual for his purpose. I do not think the parable at all warrants us to conclude that his plans succeeded—if anything, it suggests the reverse—but in fact it stops at this very point, because this was the point which

* "Non potest, quia non vult."

our Lord wished to impress upon his hearers: the necessity of instant decision, and clear-sighted energy in a matter of such moment as provision for the soul and for eternity. You and I are the stewards; and have we not wasted our master's goods, our time, our talents, our means, our influence? and even if we had done all, if we "had not at any time transgressed His commandment," are we not still only "unprofitable servants?" Our Lord demands an account of the soul He has committed to our keeping. Oh! imitate in this respect this unjust man in not wasting one moment in making provision for its safety; trust to no possible future; see yourself like him, stripped and destitute. But there is one sense, in which I would say, do not imitate him. It was all very well for him in his position to say, "I cannot dig, to beg I am ashamed;" but neither you nor I must say or feel this. We must dig more than as for hid treasures,—we must beg with the tenacity of him, who said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

SECTION LXXIX.

(Chapter xvi. verse 9—18.)

It is not always the parable or story itself which contains the marrow, but the inference which our

Lord draws from it. It is so in the present instance: the parable concluded with that declaration that "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." Wisdom, in Scripture, is often put for true religion and devotedness of heart to God, for that assuredly is the truest and only wisdom; but the epithet here translated "wise" would be more correctly rendered prudent or provident, or as we qualify the expression, *worldly wise*. There was assuredly no real wisdom in the steward's conduct; no wisdom in his object; no wisdom in his means; but there was an infinite amount of that worldly wisdom which looks only to time, and is anxious only for the interests of time, and which would in fact, in the very exercise of this wisdom, look upon a regard for things eternal as very much in the way of things temporal, and therefore puts them out of sight and out of mind till that convenient season which—never comes.

Riches assuredly are a great snare, but it is not so much here the actual possession as the coveting after them which is so great an inlet to temptation and sorrow. This unjust steward coveted after wealth, and to attain it, embezzled and mismanaged his master's property. Even at the best, and in its most innocent form, it is not the possession in which a child of God should feel any pride. It is rather a humiliating name by which our Lord here designates wealth—the Mammon of unrighteous-

ness, a deity of Pagan name, and therefore such as no one who names the name of Christ should covet after, or fall down and worship. And yet, through the grace of God, there is a way in which even that which is so dangerous and hostile may be converted into a friend; even that which is so usually an hindrance may be made a stepping-stone to heaven. And our Lord here counsels those who heard Him to make such use of these dangerous and slippery possessions, that when you part from them or they from you, they may testify that they have been employed to man's good and God's glory; and though in their misuse effectual to close, and in themselves powerless to open heaven's doors, they may yet go up as a memorial before God; and as the Saviour records each act of love to the hungering and thirsty and naked and imprisoned and sick, the everlasting doors may open wide, and you be admitted to behold the King of Glory in His beauty.

Yet no doubt the majority of those to whom our Lord was here speaking had but little of this world's wealth: they might perhaps conclude from our Lord's words that the greater the gift the more plenteous the reward, and that riches could and might attain a recompense, to which poverty or lowliness of station could have no claim. How sweetly soothing then must these words have fallen on many a disciple's heart: "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much."

It is not, God be thanked,—it is not the amount of service which the Lord looks at, but the motive which constrains the service, and the sincerity which actuates it; it is not the munificence of the gift laid upon the altar, for though it be but a cup of cold water given in Christ's name, it is accepted for His sake in whose name it is given. And He that reads the heart, and knows every throb and pulse of that heart, knows that the same love which gives the least because it has no more, would with equal, nay with tenfold delight, give of his abundance, if abundance were vouchsafed. This is a sweet text for the humble homes and humble hearts of most of God's children, for the larger portion of His family is among the lowly. The child in the family, the servant in the household, may think that they can do little for God,—that the age of the one is too tender, the position of the other too insignificant,—but it is not so; "He that is faithful in that which is least," the child that in simplicity and lovingness of heart fulfils the duties of childhood, and the servant that in singleness of heart performs the duties of a servant's station as unto God, and not unto man, will alike be accepted of Him who looketh on the hidden man of the heart, and who saith of the one, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven," and of the other, "Thou hast been faithful in a few things, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." But we must not overlook the converse of the pro-

position: "He that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much;" the same principle that leads to the violation of the smallest will lead to the transgression of the greatest, not indeed in the same sense in which St. James says that "whosoever shall offend in one point is guilty of all;" but still he that has permitted himself to offend in one is equally ready to offend in all, if the same incentive and the same impunity led him on. The same corrupt heart which led this unjust steward to embezzle and waste his lord's goods, would have equally led him, had he been the master, to have been a griping, grasping, tyrannical, and over-reaching man in all his dealings; and the same principle which permits the smallest appropriation of what belongs to another has put a key into the lock which will pick every ward, and open the door to wrong after wrong. It is not, however, so much to this point that Jesus here alludes as to fidelity to God. God has vouchsafed to us all abundant means of grace, and opportunities of working out our salvation; they are His gifts, and He expects an adequate improvement and return for them; and if you have been unfaithful in that which may so essentially be called His, because they are the purchase of His Son and the work of His Holy Spirit, how shall He bestow upon you those everlasting treasures which He had designed for you, and had promised to you if you had been faithful, and which therefore in that sense might

be truly called "yours," if you had known in time the things belonging to your peace?

SECTION LXXX.

(Chapter xvi. verse 19—23.)

THIS parable is in many respects very different from our Lord's usual discourses, in which He illustrates things spiritual by images taken from earthly and worldly objects. This, on the contrary, is a plain but most awful narrative of simple facts; it is called a parable, and it is very possible that no such persons as this rich man and Lazarus did actually live at the time. But persons very like them must have been living at the time Jesus spoke this parable; and persons very like them, I am quite sure, are living at this moment—the selfish rich and the unheeded poor. But the rich man was not condemned because of his wealth, nor the poor man accepted and recompensed because he was poor. It is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven, but it is by no means impossible; and many a rich man, through the grace of God, has made his riches as it were stepping stones to heaven. And so, on the other hand, though the doors of the kingdom are set wide open for the poor, though God has nowhere said how hard it is for them that are poor to enter there,

and has expressly declared that to them is the Gospel preached, yet it is quite true that many a poor man misses heaven and eternal happiness, and in fact, with unparalleled folly, misses both worlds. When the two characters of the present parable are first brought to our notice, nothing probably can exceed the inequality that exists between them; they are the two extremes of human life—wealth, enjoyment, luxury on the one side, all that could render the nest soft and the soul at ease;—on the other, abject poverty, destitution, suffering and disease. And at this moment, and looking only to this life, and not casting a glance beyond it, there can be no doubt in which scale human enjoyment preponderated, and few would have chosen rather to suffer affliction with the poor beggar than to enjoy the pleasures of the rich man's house for a season. There was, however, a brief moment of equality between them—the rich man died and the beggar died—even one thing befalls them both, but the equality was soon over, and wealth carries its distinctions even to the grave's edge; for the rich man had a gorgeous funeral, but of the poor man's obsequies we read nothing. He probably had a pauper's funeral, and if the world took the trouble to discuss their relative conditions, it would have been to approve the rich and to commiserate the poor man. But our Lord has lifted up the veil that hides the other world from our sight. He has for a brief moment

suffered us to glance at those two places, of which we think and talk so lightly—heaven and hell, and we there see the reality of hell's torments, and the reality of heaven's enjoyment. There is once more inequality between the two, but it is now reversed: Lazarus is comforted and the other tormented. There is something awful in the thought, that even while the rich man was being carried to his grave, and the mourners went about the streets, his spirit had already lifted up his eyes in hell, being in torments, while the beggar's glory had begun; even perhaps while his body was lying at the rich man's gate, or at any rate while it was contumeliously thrust into a pauper's grave, angels had already borne the released spirit into the presence of God.

As I have said before, this rich man was a type of a very large class—the selfish sensualist, living for himself and his own enjoyment, and without the slightest sense or conception of responsibility before God; so deeply sunk in the soul's slumber that he never even dreams—never dreams of another world, never dreams of an account to be given in—of a stewardship to be reckoned for, nor seems to have been for one moment disturbed in his course, till he awakes in hell, and lifts up his eyes in horror and surprise to find where he is. Probably death came upon him, as it did upon the other rich man, suddenly in the night-watches; and not even the vague apprehensions which some-

times disturb a sinner's death-bed had apparently tormented him before the time. In fact his character is but an embodying of the unjust steward in the preceding parable—equally unjust, equally wasting his Master's goods, and in the hour of reckoning equally found wanting; but to the one a respite, a brief interval was given in which to make provision for the day of need; and he appears as far as he could to have availed himself of it: to the other, to this miserable man, none was given, —no interval, no warning, no previous summons, but the warrant executed, and the sentence passed at once. But had he had no warnings in life, no calls to repentance in the days of his health? had God sent no message to his house, no revelation of His will, no intimation of death and judgment to his conscience? He is referred to the very means of grace that had been vouchsafed—to his piteous appeal for mercy, if not for himself, at least for his brethren, the very Scriptures in his house are named. "They have Moses and the Prophets." And no doubt he had had the same; and he well knew by his own case of how little avail it was to have a Bible merely in the house, unread, unused, unheeded; to see it perhaps day after day, but never open its pages. And, alas! is it not so among ourselves. There is no famine of the Word of God in these days and in this land, but there is a great lack of hungering and thirsting hearts; and many a rich man's mansion and many

a poor man's cottage may possess Bibles as little read and as little heeded as the roll of the Law and the Prophets was in this man's house. And if it proved such a fearful truth in his case, that "he that despised Moses' law died without mercy,—of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith He was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

SECTION LXXXI.

(Chapter xvi. verse 24 to the end.)

THERE are still some crumbs to be gathered up from this most instructive parable, that nothing be wasted; and though perhaps no parable of our Lord has been more extensively commented upon, I think we may yet collect one or two suggestions more especially adapted to a domestic purpose and a family gathering. There is much in the character of this man that is, I think, misunderstood, and so far we are in danger of losing the impressive lesson which it holds out. He is not in any degree represented to us as "a sinner above all the Galilæans." There are no traits of atrocity, no peculiar profligacy, no daring defiance of and out-

rage of public decency and opinion. In all probability, all was outward decorum and fitting adaptation to his station and requirements; the language of the parable is simply the language of description, not of condemnation. That he was rich was assuredly no sin; it is not stated that his wealth was acquired by fraud or extortion, and we may therefore reasonably conclude that it was either lawfully inherited or honourably gained. Nor do I think that it would be altogether strict justice to charge him with sin because he was clothed in purple, and fared sumptuously every day. On this point, however, I would say that I think no consistent Christian, enjoying the clearer light of revelation, would ever find delight in decking the frail or perishing body in vain and gorgeous apparel, but would rather, with the apostle, that their adorning should be the hidden man of the heart in that which is not corruptible, even the ornaments of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. And again, with regard to this man's faring sumptuously every day, I would say that I believe luxury, encreasing luxury, is one of the crying sins of our age, and one into which, with strange and melancholy inconsistency, even professing Christians are apt to fall; though, like this rich man, they may look upon it only as an adaptation to the customs of society, and the circumstances of their station. I think we should be very careful that the line of

separation between God and the world should not be less clearly marked in our own houses and our own persons than it is in the pages of this blessed book which says, "Be not conformed to this world."

Again, I cannot think that we are entitled to affix that charge on this man's character which has been so generally and prominently brought forward as its deepest stain, I mean want of charity, and hard-heartedness to the poor. It is true there is something very much like it at first sight, when the contrast is at one glance presented to our view of the rich man in his splendour and revelry, and the poor man in his beggary and squalidness at his gate; and even the very incident of the dogs licking his sores has been gratuitously assumed as heightening the darker touches of the picture, though it is quite evident that it could be in no ferocity that these dogs licked his sores.

It is indeed commonly observed, and I wish it were more general, that the servants, and even the dumb animals of a great man's house imbibe, unconsciously, the spirit of their master—if he is merciful, they are merciful and mild also,—if he is tyrannical and hard-hearted, the spirit descends even to the lowest grade—and I blush to think that in this land of charity and age of benevolence, I once knew even the dogs at a great house trained in all their natural ferocity to drive the beggar from the gates. But had this rich man acted the part of hard-heartedness supposed to attach to him,

why did he, when in torments, appeal to Lazarus to come and help him? Had he been conscious that in his days of grandeur, the beggar had been scornfully repulsed and denied at his gates, he would have felt the appeal was vain, and that as he had done to him, so would the same measure of denial and rejection be dealt out to himself. But no—he saw there, even in his unutterable anguish, in hell and in torments, the being to whom in life he had once been kind; to whom, though in recklessness and indifference he had flung the dole he craved, and at the hands of that being, the once despised beggar, he sought relief. But was his cry heard? It was indeed heard and answered, but with what retributive anguish, with what extorted acknowledgment of its truth must every word have sunk into the accusing conscience of this miserable outcast of heaven, so true is the fearful saying, that "HELL IS TRUTH SEEN TOO LATE:" "Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things, but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." What availed it to him that he had called Abraham his father? what availed it that he had relieved the beggar at his gate? There are indeed those who in the midst of their sorrows can appeal to one greater than Abraham and say, "Doubtless Thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not;" but though Abraham knew him not, the God of Abraham was

a stranger also. "I never knew you," was the thrilling declaration to sound for ever in his ears. "I never knew you," is the only answer that echoes through the space of hell.

To what a fearful extent too does the irreligion of this man's house and family appear to have spread—"I have five brethren"—and of that once flourishing and happy band of brothers, one was already in the place of torment, the other five were hastening to its flames. The warning held out in this parable is indeed most awful—to those especially, who in the outset of life determine to take their fill of pleasure and run their course of selfish gratification. Our Lord draws up as it were the curtain, points to this miserable outcast, and says, "Behold the end."

But I would not have you think that the lesson is confined to one class only, or to one set in a household. It belongs to all: it is not in the mansions of the rich alone that practical ungodliness, irreligion, and a heart estranged from God and alienated from the life in Jesus is to be found. The poor man may be as much engrossed by love of the world, as the highest and the wealthiest; the cottage of the poor may witness as much irreligion, and carnal-mindedness as a palace, and I fear I may add that as sensual and selfish and ungodly a heart can beat beneath a livery garb, as beneath the purple and fine linen of the great.

SECTION LXXXII.

(Chapter xvii. verse 1—4.)

It is a very solemn denunciation which our Lord here uses against those who should put a stumbling-block in another's path, so as to cause him to err,—for that is the meaning of the word "offend." It is seducing another into sin by example, by persuasion, or allurements of any kind. We are told indeed in the first verse that it is a case that must needs often occur, and alas our own experience and observation painfully verify our Lord's statement. Offences of this kind are continually occurring—persons are every day led into sin by the evil examples and enticements of companions and associates. Jesus indeed declares that it is impossible it should be otherwise; and it is quite true; for just look at our own hearts, how corrupt and deceitful they are by nature, how prone to mislead even of their own suggestion, how ready to fall in with the suggestions of others, how inclined to hold parley even with what we know and feel to be wrong, and almost to invite as it were, wicked thoughts to come in and tarry with us. Look too at the world with all its snares and enticements, and, above all, look at that enemy so unremittingly on the watch to lead astray, and we shall not wonder at our Lord's statement of the impossibility of banishing from such a world as this

"offences," and occasions of sin. Does this then lessen the sin, because it is so common, and because it is so impossible to root it out from hearts like ours, and a world like this? Does it diminish the offence, because we have companions to share it with us? Is it less sad to gaze upon the "broad way" because it is so thronged and crowded—or to look at that "wide gate" through which such numbers of the young and inexperienced are so thoughtlessly forcing their way? Our Lord here most emphatically guards against any such misconception by not merely denouncing a woe against that man through whom the offence cometh, but in the most striking and awful language declaring that any human torture, any suffering even unto death, would be a happier and a better doom, than to be the cause of leading any, even the humblest and lowest of God's family, into sin. I could wish indeed that such a text as this were inscribed, not indeed so much on our penitentiaries, and our houses of refuge for the erring and repentant outcast, but that it were engraven by the Spirit of God on the hearts of those who help to fill those homes with their inmates, that it might lead them in bitterness of shame and remorse to Him who has pronounced so awful a penalty on the sin, but whose blood, and whose blood alone, can cleanse from its foul and polluting stain. But it is not merely to these more aggravated instances of offence that our Lord alludes: He includes every

cause of offence, and every channel through which the offence may come. It may be that the Saviour had more especially in His thoughts at the moment those offences, which would drive away believers from their faith—to those persecutions which afterwards so painfully beset the early disciples of Christ, and which caused so many to swerve from their faith. Alas! how has persecution for the cause of Christ followed His disciples through every age, from the Jewish priest and Sanhedrim, to heathen governors and kings, and still more painfully from Christian against Christian. It may be that His prescient eye glanced through all the generations of time, and saw too the sad heresies and corruptions, and wild opinions which from age to age would so distort His Gospel, and disfigure His Church; when, not only in that predicted time of Jerusalem's desolation, false Christs would arise, and draw away many after them, seducing, if it were possible, even the very elect; but in every age, how men and women too, would be found to introduce the most extravagant notions and perverted doctrines and practices in the name of Jesus, "turning the grace of God into lasciviousness," and "wresting the Scriptures" not only to their own destruction, but to the drawing away of many for whom Christ died. Nor can I doubt that the same pervading glance, which so gathers into one view that which was, which is, and which is to come, and which spreads before Him in one

comprehensive page all the generations of time, and all the countries of the world, saw too how man would mar even God's best gifts, and divert that which He gave for man's boon into man's worst bane. I believe that when Jesus spake of the many offences that should come, and the various ways by which evil men would draw aside "His little ones" into sin, He intimated not merely the persecution which should arise, and the heresies and corruptions which should defile, and the individual pollutions and sad fallings away from purity and holiness, which the world, and the flesh, and the devil should engender; but that He meant to intimate also that most fearful engine of corruption, a licentious press, and demoralized books. And believe me, amid the many evils within you, the tempations around you, and the snares which may be laid for you, there is not one, which so panders to the devil, and so thoroughly breaks down the high barriers of principle, and lets in such a flood of dissolute immorality as much of that which is called the "cheap literature" of the day. It was a noble testimony which was given to the worth of one, that he wrote—

> "No line, which, dying, he would wish to blot."

I am afraid that many a man's own hand and pen has written down fearful records against his own soul in the licentious trash he has sought to circulate among the giddy and the young. There

is one other caution which I would give you, arising out of this subject; and it is, that in your own communications one with another, whether by word of mouth or by letter, you be very careful that no *evil* communications proceed either out of your mouth, or drop from your pen. They may be, in your estimation, but words dropped at random; but mud, you know, when thrown will stick and soil; and so slang, or dissolute remarks will adhere and stain, and it has even passed into a proverb that "the written word stays;"* and I would add, travels too, like infection or a pestilence. I would therefore not only impress upon you the value of watchfulness over yourselves in this matter, but I would have you do as David did, and turn it into a prayer, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."

SECTION LXXXIII.

(Chapter xvii. verse 5—10.)

It was a very important petition, which the disciples here offered to their Master, "Lord, increase our faith." There was the germ already of a living faith; nay, there must have been far more than the mere germ or seed. The seed had fallen and taken root when Jesus said to them, "Follow Me,"

* Litera scripta manet.

and they followed Him. There must have been from that day a great growth, a large increase of faith. It could have been no slight faith, which had led them to leave all and follow Jesus. It could have been no small amount of faith, which led them to go forth on their commission to the lost sheep of the house of Israel without purse, and without supply. And he surely had attained to great excellency of faith, who exclaimed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Nor were the rest far behind, when they testified, "Of a truth, Thou art the Son of God."

The faith of few at the present day would reach such a standard as that of these apostles; and yet we find them here praying for an increase of their faith. It is a striking illustration of what an apostle afterwards, though not one of this holy band, declared was his own practice: "Brethren," he says, "I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark;" and he adds, "Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded." And, in reality, how very slender the attainment even of the highest faith on this earth, while clogged and limited by the body—how feeble its grasp! how narrow its comprehension! how defective its scope! how encumbered its vision! And Jesus here intimates as much as this in the answer He returns to this

petition of His disciples: "If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed." And yet, humanly speaking, and to human observation, and in human estimate, the apostles had even then a large measure, though earnestly desiring a larger; but in the eyes of infinite wisdom, in the unerring vision of Jesus, in the impartial scale of omnipotence it was less than the smallest of all seeds, more insignificant than a grain of mustard seed. It was indeed a valuable lesson of humility to those to whom it was addressed; and coupled as it was with that declaration, that even after all, after a life of undeviating fidelity and obedience, they were to look upon themselves only as unprofitable servants, must have left a deep and abiding impression upon their minds. I can however readily believe that such a declaration so comprehensive and unqualified as this, may be an unwelcome truth to some, who, though not actually resting in their good works as a meritorious cause of acceptance with God, as if, as Hooker says, "they had God in their book-debts for them," yet still look complacently upon them, and would be unwilling to put them so completely in the back ground as to consider them as nothing worth; while there are others, who, being told that works are of so little account, may be apt to undervalue them, and put them so altogether aside, as to think it of little consequence whether they have any or not to shew. Now I would say in the words of one, whom I have often

quoted for the quaintness and originality of his remarks,* that "Good works are so indigent that no man can be saved by them, and yet so excellent that no man can go to heaven without them." And that "though good works may be our Jacob's staff to walk with on earth, yet they cannot be our Jacob's ladder to climb with into heaven." Eliphaz in Job had long before remarked, "Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that thou art righteous, or is it gain to Him that thou makest thy ways perfect?"

Our Lord here illustrates His remark by comparing us to a servant, who engages to do a certain amount of service for a certain amount of wages. The illustration is striking even as regards the point in question, but I would rather use it as exemplifying the relationship which appears to have existed between a master and a servant then, and that which exists now between a Christian master and a Christian servant. Jesus no doubt describes accurately the manners of the times in which He spoke, and it is certainly a curious picture of the domestic life of those days. A servant has been engaged in the out-door occupations of his master's land, ploughing, or feeding cattle, through the day; and when he returns from the field, wearied no doubt with his toil, his in-door occupations begin, and without the slightest interval

* Secker's *Nonsuch Professor.*

for rest or refreshment himself, is bidden by his master to prepare his meal, to gird himself, and wait on him, till he has eaten and drunken: and this looked upon as so much the ordinary course of service that he is not even thanked, far less rewarded for having simply done his duty. How different the service of a Christian household—how much of consideration—how much even of tenderness in the apportionment of labour—what anxiety, nay, what expenditure for the comfort and well-being of those beneath the roof. And though one does occasionally meet with those who are both exacting, and harsh, and overbearing in language as well as conduct, yet a Christian spirit is unwilling to receive even the smallest service or the most trifling duty without thanks, "knowing that we also have a Master in heaven, and that there is no respect of persons with Him." We all owe a vast debt even to the humanizing spirit of the Gospel; but a servant in a Christian family has especial reason to bless God that his or her lot has been cast in Gospel times, and in a Gospel land.

SECTION LXXXIV.

(Chapter xvii. verse 11—19.)

In this portion of St. Luke's Gospel, parables and actual facts of mercy meet one in such quick

succession, that one almost runs the hazard of blending them together, as if each narrative were a parable. But it is not so in the case now under review, for it was a real case of suffering: no less than ten unhappy beings, polluted with leprosy, beset Jesus on his way, and implored His aid. He did not comply with their request by that instantaneous cure which He had before granted to another miserable applicant, when He replied to his request, "I will, be thou clean;" but He directed them to go and shew themselves to the priests—a direction, however, which implied the promise of a cure, as the priests were to pronounce whether the cure were perfect. And so indeed these poor men understood it, for without hesitation or remonstrance, without a moment's doubt or questioning of His direction, they set forth on their appointed errand. And thus it came to pass, as they were on their way, the mercy they had sought was vouchsafed. "As they went, they were cleansed." He who before healed the leper with a touch, now healed ten without a touch: He who had before uttered those gracious words, "I will, be thou clean," now with equal ease performed the cure without a word. Not one was overlooked; it was not as with the ten virgins—that five were admitted and five shut out; it was not as with the two women in the field or the two grinding at the mill—the one taken and the other left: here *all* were included in the mercy, and each one, as he

rejoiced in his own cure, felt and saw that his brothers in misery had been healed also. Up then to this point all were alike; all had been involved in the same misery, all had sought the Saviour's help, and all had received their cure. United then in suffering, united in the blessing bestowed, were they united also in their gratitude to their benefactor? Alas! far from it. We might well have wondered at the ingratitude of man's heart had one alone out of the number under such circumstances forgotten to thank Him. One must have felt humiliated at the depravity of our nature had even the larger number passed on, and some two or three alone remained to bless and give Him the praise. But what shall we say to the record here given, that of all who had received the bounty, one only returned to give glory to God? I do not dwell on the aggravation that the ungrateful ones were Jews and the one that returned a Samaritan; but here is the fact, that of a body of men who had been one and all recipients of most astonishing mercy, one only was found to thank God for His goodness. And remember, this is no parable, like the story of the rich man and Lazarus; no fictitious narrative wrought up in overcharged colouring to make a deeper impression on our minds: it is no sketch of what human nature might be supposed to be, but which, for that nature's sake, we might hope it were not. No! these men *did* live, these men *were* lepers, they *did* actually meet Jesus;

the very words of their lips were, "Jesus, master, have mercy on us." Jesus *did* pity, *did* heal them, and, save one, they never thanked Him. But were they unnoticed? Was Jesus so habituated to ingratitude and slight that He passed it by without remark or observation?

Now I want you to notice the accuracy with which the Saviour remembers and records every act of mercy, as well as those on whom He bestows them. He healed *ten*, and the enquiry was after *ten*. "Were there not ten cleansed?" There were *nine* ungrateful, and the enquiry was after those *nine*. "Where are the *nine?*" How vain then any imagination to think that you shall escape unheeded among numbers, or that because you forget unnumbered mercies, God forgets also! Why! the very hairs of your head are all numbered; and shall that Being who disdains not to keep account of things apparently so trivial, not remember the mercies He vouchsafes, and especially those which He grants in answer to prayer? I do not know what your feelings may have been when you have read this story in your Bibles, or as you have heard it read to you now; but to me it conveys one of the most touching and affecting manifestations of the Saviour's sense of the ingratitude of man that is to be found on record. It is no indignant rebuke—it is no angry expostulation; but it is the earnest enquiry of heart-broken love disappointed in its tenderest feelings, and still

yearning in unsubdued tenderness over those whom even His love could not melt. "Where are the nine?" I can well believe that in that solemn day of reckoning, when not only the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, but the Lord's mercies also to each shall be summed up with unerring accuracy; I can well believe that even in that hour of triumph to the Redeemer's cause, even then will the same exclamation of pity be heard over some lost and absent one, "Where are you?"—you whom I had so loved, whose way I had so fenced up, whose path I had so hedged in, whom I had so daily loaded with my bounties, where are *you?* Have you also gone away? Oh! that the cry of each one, the answer of each one of your hearts, may be, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

SECTION LXXXV.

(Chapter xvii. verse 20—25.)

THE question here asked by the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, though assuredly not put by them in any spirit of reverence, and in utter ignorance of the nature of that kingdom, is yet a most important question, and one to which we at least should attach peculiar interest, since it forms one of those petitions which our Lord Him-

self taught us to use, and which we daily present before God: "Thy kingdom come." Jesus here intimates the nature of that kingdom when He says, "Behold the kingdom of God is within you." Not of course alluding to those irreverent and sceptic Pharisees, but to believers and His especial people. It is a phrase on which St. Paul afterwards somewhat enlarges when he tells us, as Jesus does here, both what it is not and what it really is. "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation;" that is, its nature is not such as can be observed by the natural eye. It has no pomp nor grandeur to attract observation; it makes no pretensions to worldy splendour; it has nothing outward to win admiration or excite desire. Even of the ruler of that kingdom, "upon whose shoulder is the government," it was predicated that He should have no form nor comeliness, and that "when we should see Him, there would be no beauty that we should desire Him." The kings of the earth make up for their outward lack by the splendour of their decorations. "They that live in king's houses wear soft clothing" and gorgeous array; and they surround their persons and their thrones with all that can inspire awe or repel intimacy. But "God's kingdom cometh not with observation." Yet we are told of a day when the Son of Man shall return in His glory, coming in the clouds of heaven with all His holy angels with Him, when the archangel's trump shall sound

and summon all nations before Him, and "every eye shall see Him." It is evident, therefore, that this is not the kingdom, nor the period of the kingdom, to which Jesus here refers when He says of it, "It cometh not with observation, for, behold, it is within you;" nor what Paul meant when he too said, "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." It is therefore an inward and spiritual kingdom, the kingdom of grace; Christ ruling and reigning in the hearts of true believers. Even at that moment when those words were uttered by Christ, when the proud and scoffing Pharisee looked at Him—the apparently mean and lowly Man before them, taunting Him with the question when the kingdom of God should come, as much as to say that it never would come, and, at any rate, that they desired not that Man to rule over them; even then the Lord looks graciously around upon His humble followers, as mean and lowly as Himself, and says, "The kingdom of God is within you." No doubt, as virtue went out from Him to heal the poor trembling woman that but touched the hem of his garment, so power accompanied His present words, and these poor despised ones of Galilee must have felt they were indeed the honoured and the trusted subjects of Him of "whose government there should be no end." There was no outward change in Christ or in themselves. He might have said to them, as

He had said before, "I must walk to-day, and to-morrow, and the day following;" and at last "be rejected of that generation." And yet one sees clearly how even with these apostles, who, like their Master, had to "suffer many things," and be rejected also, how truly these words of Jesus were verified as regarded them. Had the kingdom of God been with observation, had men marked its progress with respect to those who published it, and to those who pressed into it, it would have witnessed only, as to the outward man, persecution and torture and martyrdom. Had it been merely meat and drink, the abundance or even the bare possession of a sufficiency of the things of this world, it had never been set up with them, for they too, as well as Paul, were "in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness;" but that kingdom was "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost;" and therefore it was that they could declare and testify that as, and notwithstanding "the sufferings of Christ abounded in them, so their consolation also abounded by Christ, and that they were able to comfort those that were in trouble by the comfort wherewith they themselves were comforted of God." Oh! what a threefold cord of rejoicing is here; and how like a goodly cluster they hang on this tree of Paradise! The high places of this kingdom are reserved for all who follow Christ: the gates of this kingdom are thrown open to every one that

presseth in. "The supper is prepared, the oxen and fatlings are killed, and all things are ready." But remember, no one will be a sharer in the kingdom of glory hereafter who is not a subject of the kingdom of grace here. They are not two different kingdoms, and two different kings over them; they are but different states of the same kingdom, for, as it has been truly said, "Grace is glory begun, and glory is grace consummated or perfected."

SECTION LXXXVI.

(Chapter xvii. verse 26 to the end.)

It is a fearful picture which our Lord here gives of the state of Jerusalem as its day of desolation approached; and of the state of the world itself, when its day of final destruction shall arrive, and the King shall return in glory to take vengeance on them that would not obey Him, and then indeed to set up "His kingdom with observation." Jesus refers to two periods of the world's history in which ruin was foretold and men forewarned, and yet going on exactly in the same way, as if no such warning had been given, and no such destruction was hanging over them. To the two to which our Lord referred, we may now add a third—and as the men of Noah's time scoffed at the idea of a deluge that should drown a world, and

went on with the usual occupations and enjoyments of life, till the very moment that their doom was sealed; and as the inhabitants of the cities of the plain did the same, till the fire actually came down from heaven and destroyed them all; and as the inhabitants of Jerusalem did exactly the same, so will it be in the last day with the world itself. I do not think that our Lord means to intimate that the predicted destruction will come suddenly or even unpreparedly to all. In one sense it will indeed be sudden, for it will come when not looked for, and in one sense it may be said to be unprepared for, but it will not be without warning to prepare, without signs to open men's eyes. The deluge came not suddenly; warning enough was given, had men heeded it: every stroke of Noah's axe or blow of his hammer was a call from God, but men were disobedient and disbelieving. The men of Sodom and Gomorrah were warned, but the warning seemed to them as a mockery; the men of Jerusalem were warned that their house would be left unto them desolate, but they too read the warning with their own version of it, and disbelieved God's. And so it will continue to be —men will not believe, the world will not believe its final doom—when the Lord cometh, shall He find faith on the earth? Men can read the signs of the seasons, they can guess accurately enough the signs of the weather, but they cannot read the signs of the times—the world at this moment is as

much immersed, nay, far more so, in the things of the world; and even in this their own reckless pursuit, in their increased restlessness and eagerness, in their feverish abandonment to, and the excited delirium of, recent discoveries, we might, if we chose, read the very signs which our Lord predicts of the approaching end. I have no intention to open the page of prophecy, nor indeed do I think unfulfilled prophecy would be a fitting subject for domestic comment. But there is one point I would mention which has often occurred to my own mind with regard to the recent discoveries of gold, and the delirious and phrensied abandonment with which the world has thrown itself into the chace, and the sad and melancholy developments of the worst passions of our nature, which it has brought to light, in fact, almost bringing back upon the earth all that horrible detail of enormous crime which the apostle records in his first chapter to the Romans, as defiling the heathen world. Gold, we know has been from the very earliest period looked upon, as indeed it is, the choicest and the richest of metals; it has been the object of man's search, of man's cupidity, and, in unnumbered instances, the object for which he has bartered both body and soul. And yet for nearly 6000 years its most abundant stores have been concealed from man; God has, as it were, hidden them in His own treasure-house, dealing it out so scantily, as if man with his ungoverned passions

was unfit to be trusted with its unlimited use. Man has sought, but never found; he has traversed the very regions, where it abounds, over and over again, but his eyes were holden that he should not see—and why? Because the Lord had said, "Hitherto shall thou come, and no farther." And yet now, in the end of time, He has disclosed the store—He has bidden the mountain and the mine, the wilderness and the river alike disgorge their heaps. Science may say, "I discovered it," but science never did; she might follow on the track, when God had opened the way, but science never had the key in her hand, till God placed it there. The world says, "Chance found it out;" but that chance was the Lord's way, and the Lord's will. And now I would ask, why has He now revealed it? Is it in love—is it in mercy—is it in approval of our generation as better able to endure the fiery trial? I doubt it. Is it then in wrath—is it in His sore displeasure? I fear it. And I cannot but look upon it as one of those remarkable signs of the times, that what has been for nearly 6000 years hidden from man in mercy, is now thrown open as it were to the world's scramble, and may be found to prove, in fulfilment of the Lord's purposes, one of the most fearful ingredients in that last vial of wrath, which is to be poured upon a guilty and a doomed world.

Yet our Lord here expressly tells us that in this fearful sifting of the nations, His own shall be un-

harmed. Two men may be side by side in a field, the one swept away, the other left; two women may be occupied in the same domestic work, the one shall be taken, and the other unharmed. He who prepared an Ark for Noah, a Zoar for Lot, and a Pella for His disciples, will not fail His elect. There never of course was, or can be, a time in which neutrality in religion could be admitted. "If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him;" but I believe the time is at hand when the Lord's own people must more conspicuously than ever stand aloof from the world and the world's principles. I believe we shall soon hear God's voice more distinctly crying, "Come out of her, my people." Oh! to be one of the Lord's people in that day! to be sealed His, and His Christ's! His in time, His for evermore!

SECTION LXXXVIII.

(Chapter xviii. verse 1—8.)

THE purport for which this parable is delivered is told us in the very first verse, for an encouragement to prayer, and to perseverance in prayer under circumstances of discouragement or opposition. I will however just make one remark on one word in that verse, which has sometimes perplexed an anxious reader, as if, when Jesus said

men ought always to pray, He meant we ought to be always praying. This of course is not meant, that we should be always on our knees in prayer: such a practice would be incompatible with our duties in life, the proper discharge of which God as much demands at our hands as prayer itself. The passage seems to intimate, what indeed is most consistent even with our own reason, that there is no period of our lives, in which we can do without prayer; that there is no day in the week, in which we may neglect prayer, and no hour in the day in which prayer may not be fervently and therefore effectually offered. I am sure there is no hour in the day, in which we do not need the Lord's guidance and support—there is no path in life, in which difficulties, and trials, and perplexities, are not continually arising, and therefore I do not know a moment in which prayer may not be needful. Even those circumstances of daily life, which appear to need it least, may require it most, and when a man is most off his guard, he needs to be most prayerful: even the innocent recreations and enjoyments of society need to be fenced in with prayer, lest we inadvertently give occasion to any to speak reproachfully, or by our inconsistency throw a stumbling-block in a brother's way. I believe prayer to be the only safe staff, on which the wise traveller can lean, whether for strength as he journeys, or for support as he rests; it is with it he gropes his way safely, even in darkness; it is

with it he goes to his bed in safety, and lays him down in peace, and it is by his bedside through the night season, for instant use either at midnight, or when morning dawns. And this is what I think our Lord meant by "praying always," and St. Paul, by "praying without ceasing"—to have *always a spirit ready for prayer*. It is well, as some one says, to have the instrument always in tune. Let me just illustrate this by the simplest of all images,—what we see every day—a bird is not always on the wing—it often alights for food or rest, or to give utterance to its song, but let danger approach, let an enemy, let man or dog draw nigh, and it is instantly on the wing in search of safety—and so the Christian is not always engaged in prayer; but let danger, let trial, temptation, difficulty, or emergency beset him, and he too is instantly on the wing, his heart goes up in prayer to the throne of God, and he is safe. He carries with him a spirit ready, and tuned for prayer or praise, wherever he goes, and whatever he meets with by the way. And, as is said of the lark, that the higher it soars, the sweeter its notes: so the heart of the child of God never gives utterance to such sweet expressions of praise, as when, far out of the reach and thought of earth, it seems to have caught some sound of the strains of heaven.

The parable however before us seems more immediately to direct us to perseverance in prayer under even the most discouraging difficulties—such

as Job felt, when he said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." And assuredly few circumstances could be more discouraging, or more likely to cause a person to be wearied or faint in their supplication for right than are here represented. Who are the parties? On the one side, a poor widow—the representation of all that is feeble, and friendless, and destitute; on the other, an iniquitous and tyrannous judge, who was little influenced by any of the ordinary motives, which restrain from wrong or guide to right. This poor widow evidently had right on her side: her words, "Avenge me of mine adversary," in no degree imply that she sought for vengeance or punishment on one who had offended her or become her enemy; but they simply call on this judge to "judge righteous judgment," and to afford her that right of which she had been wronged. But this makes no difference in her favour; he repulses her suit, he wishes not to be disturbed, and closes alike his ear and heart against the poor widow's appeal. Yet she at last gains her suit—and how? Because she gives him no rest, neither day nor night—wherever he goes, wherever he appears, there is the widow's cry in his ears, "Avenge me of mine adversary"—till at length she wearied him into granting, for his own ease, what the justice of her case could not extort from him.

Now of course God does not represent Himself under this character of the unjust judge; it is to

contrast His own attributes of loving-kindness, tender compassion and mercy, with the oppression, hard-heartedness, and injustice of this man. The one is called the unjust judge; nay, he hesitates not to describe himself, he rather prides himself on his being one that feared neither God nor man,* while God's name is revealed to Moses as "The Lord, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." The one was soon wearied by the continual coming of a poor supplicant; the other, by the mouth of His prophet, asks, "Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, *neither is weary?* It was His especial promise in the law, "Ye shall not afflict any widow: if thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto Me, I will surely hear their cry." And how triumphant the question, how unanswerable the inference—"And shall not God avenge his own elect?"—His own chosen precious ones,—though for a season He may seem to close his ears, though for His own gracious purposes of love toward them, He may suffer their affliction for a season to continue? And yet how slow are we to believe God's love in the storm! how dim are our eyes "behind a frowning Providence to see a smiling face!" Do

* It was said of Vitellius, "*ουτε των ανθρωπων ουτε των θεων φροντιζεν.*"

you think, if the Lord were to deal with any one of us, as He did with Job, if He were to strip us of all we loved, of all we prized, of all that rendered life's pilgrimage less weary, less burdensome, we could find faith in our hearts to say with the patriarch, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." We have all need in this and every matter to cry with the apostles, "Lord! increase our faith."

SECTION LXXXIX.

(Chapter xviii. verse 9—14.)

In the preceding parable of the unjust judge and the importunate widow, our Lord had most forcibly pointed out the value and efficacy of fervent, importunate prayer. But, alas! there are so many that use the words, but have not the spirit of prayer—there are so many that pray, and yet pray amiss, as regards the frame and temper of their mind; so many that convert that greatest privilege of prayer into the very occasion of sin, that this second parable, which I have just read, is expressly spoken for the purpose of condemning one class of petitioners, and of encouraging another—while it speaks rebuke to the one, it is full of comfort to the other—it gives a specimen of the prayer that

will not enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, and it gives also a pattern of one that will. The characters brought before us are of the two classes, which would most effectually answer our Lord's purpose—a Pharisee, full of arrogance, conceit, and spiritual pride, most zealous, nay rigid, in the performance of all outward duties—and a Publican, always a degraded man in the eyes of his countrymen, and too generally dishonest and extortionate. Yet these two are found going to the temple at the same time to pray, not indeed in the spirit of those two of whom we read in the Psalms, "taking sweet counsel together, and walking to the house of God as friends." Their position in society precluded intimacy, and probably even acquaintance; yet the very circumstance of finding himself united in purpose, and that a purpose of devotion and prayer, would, one might have thought, have led the Pharisee to look kindly on his fellow-worshipper. If ever there is equality on this earth between man and man, in social rank at least, it is assuredly in the house of God, and in the season of prayer. The rich and the poor meet together; the Lord is the maker of them both; their condi- is the same as guilty sinners, and their wants are the same, forgiveness and mercy. And, yet, even at the very beginning, there is separation, there is exclusiveness: we need not imagine this Pharisee shrinking away contemptuously from this poor Publican as if he meant to say, "Stand by thyself,

come not near to me, for I am holier than thou," though I dare say he thought something very like this—for custom had done that quite as effectually for him, as his own feelings might otherwise have led him to do for himself. The Pharisee at once took his station in the more honourable place, the court of the Israelites, and probably as near the court of the priests as he could, while the despised Publican stood in the more distant court of the Gentiles, as if unworthy to draw nigh to one, whom he no doubt looked upon as so holy and righteous as this Pharisee. And I would just remark here that I think in our country and in our own churches there is still too much distinction kept up, still too much standing apart, too much shrinking from the lowlier and the meaner clad; and though much of this must of necessity arise, and much no doubt from the same lowly spirit, which probably directed the steps of the publican to where he stood, yet one cannot help feeling that there is still too much of that "respect of persons" which makes the invidious distinction between what St. James calls the "gay clothing," and the "vile raiment" in the apportionment of sittings in our places of worship. I cannot however but suspect that even as they were going to the temple, the Pharisee cast a few contemptuous glances at his fellow-worshipper, as much as to say, "What doest thou here?" and if so, entering as he did the house of God with high notions of his own righte-

ousness and with perfect complacency as to his own position in the sight of God, and a very contemptuous estimate of his neighbour's, one is not so much surprised at the channel in which his thoughts run, or the expressions in which they give themselves vent. It is called a prayer, and assuredly neither with Jew nor Gentile, can thanksgiving be called an unessential or unimportant part of prayer. I find no fault with his thanking God, that he had not been led into the commission of gross sin, had he but felt and acknowledged that through the grace of God he had been preserved, and kept by the power of God unto salvation. Other men, unhappily, are led into these sins, and "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." The thanksgiving however soon slides off into an enumeration of his own merits, as if he undoubtedly had God in his book-debts. And yet what did it amount to? that he had not been guilty of crimes which his position in society hardly tempted him to, and that he had complied with two outward observances, which the world saw and would applaud: while all the time he had never touched the plague-spot—never found out the plague of his own heart, never felt anything of that broken and contrite heart, which, almost within his hearing and certainly within his sight was pouring out its brief but emphatic prayer to God. As they entered the temple, so they left it, in the sight of man at least, and probably in their

own sight too: the Pharisee stalked home with head erect, quite convinced and satisfied that God had few such servants as he: and the poor publican abased and cast down, and still no doubt repeating in his heart the prayer he had uttered in the temple, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

I would make only two other remarks—the one is, that though I do not imagine such a form of words as this of the Pharisee ever really does proceed out of a man's mouth as prayer, I fear some such thoughts as he had are very often passing through a man's mind as he sits and worships in the house of God. Many a supercilious self-righteous Pharisee is found in Christian ranks; and many a time, I have no doubt, when the preacher is laying bare the deep corruption and estrangement of the natural and unrenewed man, he may have cast up his eyes with haughty surprise as much as to say, "Who convinceth me of sin?" The other observation is that real fervent prayer does not consist in fluency or vain repetition. I believe no prayer has been so often repeated as this of the poor Publican—it is the prayer for all times and seasons, for health and life, for sickness and a dying hour: it reaches the emergency of the most learned, it meets the wants and the capacity of the most ignorant. It was an accepted prayer in the temple, and, you may depend upon it, it will be an accepted prayer also, if each one of us utters it to-night in the solitude and secrecy of our own chambers.

SECTION XC.

(Chapter xviii. verse 15—17.)
Matt. xix 13—15. Mark x. 13—16.

I DO not know that Luke intended any peculiar reference to the preceding parable in the incidents which he so immediately subjoins; and yet there is a striking appropriateness in the character of little infants to that of the humble publican, while the character of the self-complacent, self-righteous youth may with equal propriety represent the vain-glorious Pharisee enumerating all his good deeds. Let us gather up the instruction which the first incident scatters in our path. "And they brought unto him also infants." Our translation hardly gives the full meaning of the passage; it would be more consonant to the original to say, "And they brought unto him even infants;" as if to imply that even at that earliest period, before intelligence has dawned, before memory has ought on which it can exercise itself, and while affection is more an instinct than a preference of reason, while in fact they are and can be but little more than passive recipients of God's bounty or God's love—Jesus is more than ready to receive them. He is displeased at their being withheld, as it were, from Him either by the mistake or prejudices of some, or the guilty negligence of others. We know that under the old covenant made with Abraham, infants even of

the tender age of eight days were to be brought to God, and that a heavy penalty was denounced on those that kept them from Him. It could assuredly be no faith in the babe, no desire on his part, no consent of his understanding: the infant was as unconscious as it was passive, or indeed we might say as it was resisting, for no doubt nature even in an infant of eight days shrunk from pain and suffering. But yet God in His wisdom and love appointed that such should be brought unto Him; even at that early period, in His heart and purpose the Lord had declared that of such should be the kingdom of heaven. Even under the limited restrictions of the patriarchal and afterwards the Jewish covenant, God manifested His especial love to the young by admitting an infant of eight days into all the privileges of covenant with Himself. And is the Gospel narrower than the Law? Are the blessings of the covenant more extended to the Jewish descendant of Abraham, than the Christian inheritor of Abraham's faith, and Abraham's blessing?

But without entering further into this question, the incident here recorded is one of especial comfort and encouragement to parents to bring their children to Christ even from their earliest hour. How glad, how precious must that sound of Jesus' words have been in these mother's ears, as He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me." I fear parents do not sufficiently realize the value of

the Saviour's blessing on their infant offspring. I am not now speaking of their bringing them to Jesus and dedicating them to Him in baptism, but of that more private and secret consecration of them in their own hearts to the love and service of their Covenant Redeemer, known only to God and their own hearts, as Hannah dedicated her yet unborn child to the God who gave him. I do not think parents know the blessing to their own souls in thus pleading with God for those young ones, of whom the Lord said with each, "Nurse this child for me." There is a vast amount of education going on, there is a vast and progressive interest for the well-being of the little ones of our folds, but I believe that disappointment and failure in many an instance follows, because the best of all education, the holiest of all training is wanting in that home-discipline and that spiritual and religious culture, that leading to Jesus, that parental wrestling with God in prayer for children, which after all is the keystone of the arch. Nor do I think that Jesus meant to confine these words or this injunction to parents alone: they seem to me to breathe the very essence of love and anxious yearning for the young; as if, in that hour, His eye glanced into the future and saw in many a Christian land the schools and institutions for the purpose of training children to come to Jesus, and as if His heart was even then prophetically saying to many a Sunday-school teacher, to many a young

one guiding others still younger, "Teach little children to come to Me; teach them the Way, the Truth, and the Life; bring them by your instructions, by your example, and still more by your prayers, to love and serve Me; gently lead them, as I have led you." I do not know a more lovely sight, I do not think the Saviour looks on any with a more approving eye, than a young man or young woman, themselves taught of God, and constrained by the love of Christ, becoming themselves as little children for children's sakes, adapting themselves to their thoughts, their feelings, their desires, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose, enduring the contradiction of the wayward and unruly, and winning souls to Christ from those very ranks of whom He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me."

SECTION XCI.

(Chapter xviii. verse 18—27.)
Matt. xix. 16—30. Mark x. 17—31.

St. Luke, as well as Matthew and Mark, gives us this melancholy history of him, who did run well—who set out on his heavenward course with an earnest desire to reach the goal he aimed at,—and yet fell short. As I have said before this is no ideal story, this young man really lived; and the

whole transaction recorded here really took place. It is true, he has long since passed from this earth. More than 1800 years have rolled away since this young man asked of Jesus, then on earth, the way to heaven: whether he eventually found his way there, or whether his heart became more and more engrossed by his worldly treasures so as to exclude the Saviour, we have no means of judging. "The volume of the book" of his life from that eventful hour is closed, till it shall be again unrolled in that day, when the books shall be opened, and the dead, both small and great, shall stand before God. We hear no more of him: and though charity and something of that feeling which would incline us to look lovingly on one, who had so much to love in him, would incline us to hope, that by the grace of God, as he saw and felt more and more the hollowness of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, his desire for heaven might be reawakened; yet one cannot but fear that he who forsook and rejected a present Saviour, who disbelieved or distrusted His promise when uttered by His own lips, would not be very likely to seek an absent Saviour. Nor is it probable, or at all consistent with the experience of human nature, or with the workings of the human heart, that where the love of money takes possession of a young man's heart, it ever becomes weaker; it is far more likely to increase and strengthen with advancing years. And yet melancholy as it is to

retrace this young man's career, so promising, so lovely, so earnest and anxious at the first, one may read the transcript of it in the career of many of the young even in the present day. Education, parental instruction, the earnest prayers and teaching of a pious mother are apparently frequently blessed of God to lead the young heart to Jesus; the gentle restrictions too and usages of a holy household tend to confirm these impressions, and there is no insincerity, no hypocrisy in the feeling with which many a young heart really resolves to give itself up to God, and to follow the Lord fully. It is true, these feelings and impressions receive a rude shock, and have a perilous ordeal to go through, when they are first sent from the parental roof to mingle with other youths of their own age: and in this inevitable collision with the careless, the indifferent, the irreligious, the dissolute and the sneering, much of that fresh and lovely bloom of early piety and the "first love" is unhappily brushed away. Yet again, in the mercy of God, there is another turning point in the spiritual life and progress, in which all these feelings and impressions are not only once more drawn forth, but deepened and hallowed, when the deliberate choice is set before him, whom he will serve; when the snares and temptations, which will beset him from the world, the flesh, and the devil, and that worst enemy his own heart, are faithfully laid before him, and the solemn obligations of his baptismal vow

affectionately pressed home upon his conscience in the season of confirmation. It is indeed a most interesting and important period in the lives of the young, forming, as it does, a starting point from which they set out in their respective conditions of life with resolutions yet unbroken, promises yet warm upon their lips, love to God as yet unchilled, and sincerity of purpose as yet unstained by fall or falsehood. And when this resolution is accompanied by earnest prayer, and followed up, as it often is while the impression is vivid, by a renewed and apparently sincere dedication of himself at the table of the Lord, can we help feeling as Jesus felt for this young man, and as we look and gaze on his high resolve, his ingenuous aspect, and his deep reverence of manner, do we not "love him" too. And what has hindered them that they should not obey the truth? They have declined from their first love, they have set up for themselves a far lower standard than the Word of God has fixed, they have mingled with the world and and adopted its standard, and an Apostle tells us, as the result of his own experience, "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump"—and so they have become worldly-minded, "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." They may have felt sorrowful, as they went away from Jesus, "very sorrowful" as this young man was—a sigh may have escaped them, as they recurred to early scenes and early impressions and felt how they had

become entangled and choked in the cares or pleasures of the world—but still this sorrow is not, yet at least, godly sorrow, and we can only pray for them that they may be "delivered out of the snare of the devil, who have been taken captive by him at his will."

SECTION XCII.

(Chapter xviii. verse 28—34.)
Matt. xx. 17—19. Mark x. 32—34.

THE disciples of Jesus are here brought before us in two very painful lights. In the first place, we find Peter arrogantly claiming something very like merit for what they had surrendered for their Master's sake, and most assuredly exaggerating the sacrifices they had made; and accompanied too I fear by something very like ungenerous triumph and claim of superiority over the unhappy youth who had just left Jesus because he had not courage to surrender *all*. It shews indeed how little impression, as yet, their Master's words had made upon their minds, how little root His warnings had hitherto taken. "Lo! we have left *all* and followed Thee," is Peter's boasting assertion: "When ye have done *all*, say we are unprofitable servants," had been that Master's charge a short time before. Matthew indeed adds to Peter's words here: "What shall we have therefore," as

if setting up a claim and demanding payment and reward for their poor sacrifice; and as if too it had been from first to last a disinterested generous service without any prospective thoughts of that kingdom, which they fully expected Jesus would set up, and for precedency in which they were continually disputing. One might have thought that they had now been long enough with Jesus to have imbibed somewhat of his tender compassionate nature; and that upon seeing this young ruler so full of hope and promise, with so much to call for love, and so much more for pity, and yet going away from Jesus, their hearts would have been filled with sorrow instead of breaking out into this ungenerous comparison between themselves and him. It in some degree prepares us for the next incident, and the striking picture it presents to us of the unwillingness of the human heart to receive unwelcome truths—with what self-delusion they evade it and put it far away from them. It was not the first time that Jesus had intimated to His followers the sad scenes of sufferings and persecution through which He was to pass; and they had, we must not say, disbelieved their Master's words, but had repudiated them as derogatory to His glory, or had imputed other meaning than the literal words implied. And now that the time was drawing nigh for the accomplishment of what He had foretold them, and that He was actually on His progress to that

guilty city which was to fill up the measure of her iniquities by shedding His blood: He still more minutely repeats the sad detail of torture and indignity to which He should be subjected. Yet even thus, and even now, they could not and they would not understand Him. The veil was upon their hearts, and they did not wish it removed—their imaginations had sketched a triumphant Saviour, and they could not realize a suffering one. They had no doubt read their prophets, or might have heard them read, but they had probably only read or selected those passages which told of the glories and extension of the Redeemer's kingdom—they had passed over as unwelcome or unimportant, as mysterious and therefore needless, those predictions which spoke of Him as a man of sorrows, or it may be, as having reference to some other; like the Ethiopian eunuch afterwards when he said to Philip, "Of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?" One perhaps therefore hardly wonders so much at the darkness which hid these things from their sight, and rendered them so incredulous to His approaching sufferings. And yet I can well imagine that there was one among that little band on whom the words of Jesus were even then making a silent, and at the moment perhaps, an unconscious impression: and that was Judas. He had no doubt imbibed with the rest the firm conviction that his Lord and Master would be a King, that

He would establish now His kingdom in Israel. It was, there can be little doubt, with such feelings as these, and with the prospect of sharing in its honours and its wealth, that he had enrolled himself a follower even of the lowly and despised Jesus. And as we know that two of them had selected and solicited the station they coveted in that kingdom, we may well imagine that as in their present little company Judas bare the bag and what was put therein, so he might cherish in his secret heart some eager hopes of that not far distant day, when he might become the treasurer of the realm, and have the guardianship of its revenues. To such a worldly and money-loving spirit it must have been peculiarly galling and displeasing to hear the series of cruel insults terminating in a death of shame; and though no doubt he tried, like the rest, to put away the truth, or to interpret it in some sense favourable to his own wishes, yet the impression must have remained, and it is more than probable that even then Satan might suggest to him, "What! if, after all, I am following one doomed to die a malefactor's death!" And at that very moment might the first seed of his future treachery have been dropped into his covetous heart. Oh! how necessary the apostle's caution, "Resist the devil." Had Judas said with the instant indignation of his Master, "Get thee behind me, Satan," he had no doubt been saved; but he kept the seed where it fell, brooded over

it, suffered it to take root, and it soon grew apace, and "filled his heart." "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

SECTION XCIII.

(Chapter xviii. verse 35 to the end.)
Matt. xx. 29—34. Mark x. 46—52.

In this account of restoring sight to the blind there is much that reminds one of that earlier miracle of Jesus in healing the leper. There, you may remember, the leper urges his request that he may be made "clean." The answer of Jesus is, "Be thou 'clean,'" and immediately it is added, "he was 'cleansed.'" So here the blind man in answer to our Lord's enquiry what He could do for him, replied, "That I may receive my sight." "Receive thy sight," is the answer; and again it is added in the same words, "immediately he received his sight."* Such instances as these, and I believe they might be multiplied, are, to me at least, very touching proofs not merely of the Lord's gracious answer to our prayers, but His tender condescension in taking as it were the very words out of our mouth, and adopting as His own the very expressions we have used for His own answer. We do not, of course, expect

* The original is very striking, "*Ἵνα ἀναβλέψω*—*Ἀνάβλεψον*—*ἀνέβλεψε*."

to hear the Lord Jesus audibly repeating our words now, as He did when on earth, but there is something most touching as well as consolatory in the conviction which this incident confirms, that even the broken accents of prayer are so far from being unheard and unanswered that our Lord seems here to intimate, that those very words, if they are uttered in fervency and faith, have found ready access to, and acceptance in, His heart. They were but simple words which this blind man used: "Lord! that I may receive my sight," but they fell on no unheeding ear, they reached no unanswering heart, and were responded to, nay, and adopted as the very vehicle of Jesus' own reply, as much for the encouragement of the poor supplicant as for the rebuke of those that would have kept him from Jesus. There are many, I have no doubt, that are deterred from prayer by a feeling that such poor prayers as they can offer must be of so little worth, so broken, so inarticulate, so ignorant, so poor, so feeble, and so confused, that the Lord could never listen to prayers such as theirs; and though their heart is full of prayer, and ready to run over, and *is running* over from their eyes, if not from their lips, they are yet deterred from giving utterance to it by a consciousness of their very emptiness. Alas! if a sense of unworthiness is to keep a sinner from God, there would be no prayer reaching to the throne of God, if the poor, the ignorant and the

unlettered are to be debarred from drawing nigh to God, till they have learned fluency and confidence, prayer would indeed be "restrained before God." The most effectual prayers recorded in Scripture are the simplest and the shortest, and the apostle speaks of prayer and intercession so broken by sighs and groans, and interrupted by tears, that it cannot be uttered at all, so true is the Psalmist's testimony, "He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer." It has been often remarked, as no doubt it would, for the experience of every one of God's children confirms it, that one finds more instances of fervent earnest prayer, adapted to every condition, every emergency and trial, in the Book of Psalms than in any other portion of Holy Writ. And I really think that of all the Old Testament worthies David had, if I may so speak, the sweetest experiences in prayer; and as he was indeed a man after God's own heart, so he seems to have known more of the mind and heart of God as a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God. It may be that more of his private communings with God have come down to us, and that we see this man of God in all the phases and vicissitudes of his chequered life—in his sorrow—his persecution—his exile—in his sin and broken-hearted penitence—in his depressed as well as his triumphant moments. And I cannot but think that this poor blind man, rebuked, rebuffed, and thrust back by

those around him, yet "crying out so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me," must have taken, as it were, a leaf out of David's own book of prayer: "Make haste, O God, to deliver me—make haste to help me. I am poor and needy, make haste unto me, O God." Such importunity—such "saying the same words"—such crying out the more earnestly, because of repulse or delay. I have spoken of the Lord's tenderness in answering prayer almost in the very words of the prayer,—"That I may receive my sight!"—"Receive thy sight." You know that we are taught that we must be conformed to His image, and have more and more of the same mind that is in Him. It is that clear transcript of the mind of Jesus in the believer's heart, for which He sits as a refiner and watches and waits; and I do not know a more touching exemplification of such a spirit than in that same Book of Psalms, when the Lord calls upon His child, "Seek ye my face," and the instant child-like answer of docility and love is, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek." Oh that we may have such a spirit in our prayer! Give, my son, give Me thy heart. "My Father, take Thou my heart." And if this incident gives encouragement to take our wants and necessities in simple prayer to God, it gives us also a striking instance of what should follow, when that prayer is heard and answered. This man "followed Jesus glorifying Him." And so let our song be of all

the great things the Lord hath done unto us,—how He hath not only "healed our diseases, but forgiven our iniquities."

SECTION XCIV.

(Chapter xix. verse 1—10.)
Matt. xx. 29—34. Mark x. 46—52.

MANY hundred years before the period of which we have just read, Joshua, the captain of the Lord's host, had laid a fearful curse on Jericho, and fearfully and accurately had it been fulfilled. But, as even that captain had saved a Rahab from amid its guilty and devoted people, so now the true Joshua rescues a degraded publican from the bondage of sin. He well knew, even before He drew nigh to Jericho, that there dwelt within its walls one to whom His presence would prove a blessing—one, lost and polluted indeed in the eyes of his countrymen, yet still an object of compassion to Him, who came to seek that which was lost—one, who though probably he had never up to that hour thought of Jesus, would yet respond to the first call his Saviour made him, would receive him alike into his house and heart, and become not only a true son of Abraham, but a child of God through grace. Among the many deeply interesting incidents which marked our Lord's sojourn on earth, there is perhaps not one

which so strikingly illustrates His omniscience as God, or so beautifully develops the benevolence, and I would say the courtesy and amenity of His human character as the one now before us. It is indeed but the narrative of the conversion of one perishing sinner, it tells us but of one wandering sheep brought home to the fold; yet He who so touchingly described Himself under the character of a Shepherd seeking His lost sheep, and His angels as counting their gains by units, and rejoicing over one alone brought safely back, permits each lost and perishing one now to adopt its promises as his own—whoever he be, wherever he may have wandered from His Father's house, whatever stain of pollution he may have acquired in his guilty progress, still over him does the Saviour yearn as compassionately as He did over Zacchæus. The self-righteous Pharisee, the outcast harlot, the miserable cripple, the unclean leper, and now the defrauding publican, were all in their turns the objects of the Saviour's love.

It was probably no higher motive than curiosity which induced the wish of Zacchæus to see Jesus—the mere worldly man, engaged in the duties and engrossed by the cares of his station, he was perhaps only curious to see the man, who as he had probably just heard, had restored sight to the blind. Yet now mark with "wonder, love, and praise," the sovereign grace and electing love of God in thus singling out this lost one. Among

the many human beings, who on that day of mercy thronged the highways of Jericho, not one save Zacchæus, save the degraded publican, heard that gracious declaration, "To-day I must abide at thy house:" so true is it that by grace are we saved, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. How beautifully, and how literally too was the declaration of the prophet realized to this outcast wanderer from Israel's fold, "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, and have called thee *by thy name;* thou art mine." As a father knoweth his child's name, or as friend speaketh with friend, so Jesus disdained not to call this publican by his name, "Zacchæus, make haste and come down." And with what instant readiness was the call obeyed—and how sweetly does it illustrate what I was saying, yesterday—"Zacchæus, make haste;"—"he made haste." "Zacchæus, come down;"—"he came down." No difficulty, no impediment arose that he was unprepared—no suggestion that business called him elsewhere, that his worldly gains would be lessened by devoting a few hours to the reception and entertainment of Jesus; there was no answer, that he had bought a farm or oxen, or married a wife—or, that when he had a more convenient season he would receive Him—not a word of excuse, or evasion, or delay was uttered; and he whose thoughts up to this moment had probably dwelt on little else than his dishonest gains and his worldly business, now, at the first call of Jesus

opened both his house and his heart and received Him joyfully. I would just say to you, ask yourselves if you have done likewise? Have you never resisted God's gracious dealings with your own hearts and consciences, closed your ears against His calls, and rejected His gracious offer to "come in and sup with you?" Little did Zacchæus think, while stooping forward amid the branches of that sycamore-tree to catch a sight of Jesus, that, ere night, he should repose beneath the shadow of that tree, "whose leaves are for the healing of the nations."

Zacchæus never saw his Saviour again on this earth—in one short week He was crucified! With what lingering and affectionate memory, with what intense feeling would he dwell on every part of that interview, on every word that dropped from the lips of Him, who had so soon sealed them as it were with His own blood. One can well imagine with what feelings Zacchæus must have looked upon that tree, amid the branches of which he had first seen Jesus, and amidst whose boughs he had first heard the gracious call, which awakened him him to penitence and peace. There are feelings, even in our wayward hearts, which almost seem to have a foretaste of heaven—which never die—which, as long as the heart throbs, and the pulse beats, continue to burn within us, and which I doubt not, survive even the dissolution of the body, and which add melody to the songs of praise, and

the fervency to hallelujahs of thanksgiving even in heaven; and it is when the soul dwells on the period and the place, where we first learned to know Jesus, when His call first sounded in our ears, and His love entered our hearts. Zacchæus in the sycamore, Nathanäel beneath his fig-tree, Saul on the highroad, the sons of Zebedee in their father's boat, Matthew at the banker's counter, and Elisha at the plough, and many a saint now gathered to his rest, and many a rejoicing pilgrim still on earth are dwelling with undiminished rapture on the first call of Him who hath called them to Himself. I would pray that it may be so with you, and whether it be while I am now speaking to you, or when we kneel in prayer, or when you retire to your own rooms and kneel there in secret prayer, if you hear the voice of Jesus calling to you, oh, "make haste, and receive Him joyfully." Answer Him, "Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth: what wilt Thou have me to do?" And if He whispers by His Holy Spirit, "My son, give Me thine heart," oh, let that heart respond, "My heart, Lord, will I give."

SECTION XCV.

(Chapter xix. verse 11—27.)
Matt. xx. 29—34. Mark x. 46—52.

THE purport with which our Lord spake this

parable is distinctly mentioned in the first verse I have just read—"He spake this parable because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought the kingdom of God should come." Jesus had now, in His progress from Galilee, very nearly reached Jerusalem, and His disciples, and many perhaps of those who were following Him, shared in the belief that He was now about to establish that kingdom and claim that throne to the reality of which they so obstinately clung. It was to disabuse their minds of such an error that He uttered this parable.

He was indeed, like that nobleman of whom He speaks, about to receive a kingdom, but it was not a kingdom on earth. He had left the glory which He had with the Father before all worlds, and had come for a season and for an especial purpose to sojourn on this earth: but He was now about to return and receive that mediatorial kingdom, which He was soon to purchase with His own blood. Yet, ere He departed, ere He ascended on high, He gave gifts unto men, He left powers and privileges and authority with His servants, to be exercised in His service and for His glory. There is a very great resemblance between this parable and that of the talents, as recorded by St. Matthew: and yet there are many marked differences, which are well worthy of comment. Here every one receives alike; and therefore the pound distributed to each one of the servants can-

not mean the various privileges and opportunities and ways of usefulness, which vary so much in their apportionment to each—to some much, to others little is given. Here all are alike; the difference is in the amount gained by each, in the increase acquired by trading. The pound in the hands of one gains ten pounds, the same amount in the hands of another gains only five. But there is one remark I would make arising from the language of each as he is called up before his lord, and which is most significant. The first says, "Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds;" and so the second in the same spirit says, "Thy pound hath gained five pounds;" and even the rude uncourteous unprofitable servant, who made no use of his master's money, yet acknowledges it was his, and says, "Here is *thy* pound." It was not their own; it had never been, not even when entrusted to their keeping, and committed to their management. It had been placed in their hands by one who had authority to reclaim, and for the proper use and application of which they were responsible to him. And so we may as truly say of every gift we have, of every privilege we enjoy, of every talent we possess, "It is not our own: it is Thine —it is the Lord's." There is nothing that we have which we have not received, and there is nothing we have received, which we are not to lay out again for the glory of Him who gave it. There was much indeed in this parable that related

only to the Jews and the men of that generation, but there is another thread of truth running through it, and which reaches even to our own times, and our ownselves; and I think we can hardly read this instructive parable in a proper and a prayerful spirit without deriving from it an especial and appropriate blessing. In the first place it strikes at the root of all pride—we are so apt to pride ourselves upon some thing or other, as if it were our own and self-produced; however poor or insignificant it may be in itself, yet it is a source of pride to our vain and foolish heart. I do not now so much speak of the pride of intellect, though one feels at once it is the most presumptuous of all pride, nor of that pride of wealth, which is the most precarious of all pride, nor would I even speak of that which is the poorest of all pride, the pride of dress; but I would speak of that which is so natural to us all, the pride of righteousness, which is the most sinful of all. How far removed from this the acknowledgment of these servants, "Lord, thy pound hath gained!" "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing; by the grace of God I am what I am." "I have laboured more abundantly than they all" was the momentary utterance even of an apostle's vain-glorious assertion; but how instantly corrected, how crushed and kept down by the recollection, "yet not I, but the grace of God that was in me." And what, indeed, have we that we have not received; and

though in one sense we have all received alike, we do not all bring forth fruit alike, nor even in proportion to the sum allowed us to trade with, to the means and opportunities of improvement vouchsafed to us. And even of him, whose produce was the largest, I have no doubt he had to mourn over many a barren season and unproductive effort, many a short-coming, as well as many a mis-doing: when wearied in well-doing, and spent, and faint, he has been inclined to let the hands hang down, and to think that what he has already done, or already attained, would be ample enough; while I have no doubt there was one ever at his elbow to whisper, "Why take so much pains, why so overearnest, so righteous over much;" or, "why begin so early, or labour on till dark night: take a little ease." But if there be no room for pride in this parable, laying every human attainment low in the dust before the cross of Jesus, there is none for discouragement even at our poorest and feeblest efforts. It was the same commendation though not the same extent of reward: there is no intimation that the less successful trader or servant was negligent or lax—there is no rebuke or hint at unfaithfulness. It is only to him who has deserted his station, and has not fulfilled its duties who has slumbered on the post assigned him, who, though he may not have been so much actively guilty, as torpidly indifferent to his master's honour, and selfishly indulgent to his own ease, to him, even out of his own

mouth and by his own just judgment, a righteous sentence is awarded, that he who has foolishly and indolently neglected and tampered with his master's means, should be no longer intrusted with their management or keeping.

SECTION XCVI.

(Chapter xix. verse 28—40.)
Matt. xxi. 1—16. Mark xi. 1—11. John xii. 12—19.

THE incident recorded in these verses is a striking proof of the power exercised by our Lord over the minds of men. Jesus, in accordance with ancient prophecy, was to enter Jerusalem as a King coming unto His own, amid the rejoicings and exultations of her inhabitants,—and yet lowly, and seated on an ass's colt. He was now nigh to the city, scarcely more than a mile from it, and as yet no preparation was made for the fulfilment of His purpose, nor even any announcement of His intention. In all probability the prophecy itself, if even known to His disciples, was unremembered at the moment; and even if known and remembered, it never could have occurred to them to connect it in any way with their Master, and His present journey. Yet Jesus must enter Jerusalem in the way named, or the prophecy would have been unfulfilled, and the Word of God void. To speak

after the manner of men, the whole proceeding seemed to have been so driven off to the last moment, as to be beyond the power of human accomplishment. Jerusalem was the very centre of His worst enemies, they were even thirsting for His blood, and plotting His destruction; He had no partizans, no friends, and scarcely, so to speak, any acquaintances in the city; and yet almost within the hour He was to enter that city amid the shoutings and acclamations of her people, in triumphant and more than royal procession; for, "Hosanna to the Son of David," "Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord," were to be the cries that should rend the air. Could any supposition, any purpose be more unlikely, more impracticable? And yet God, by the mouth of His holy prophet, had declared it should be so; therefore, as Jesus emphatically said, even if the multitudes that thronged the streets and shouted, "Blessed be the King that cometh," had held their peace, if man and woman and little ones had held their tongues and uttered no welcome, the very stones of the streets would have risen up to "make good the word of the Lord." And yet how simple, how unpretending the whole process by which it was accomplished! As He approached the little adjoining villages of Bethpage and Bethany, He stopped at the Mount of Olives, and sent two of His disciples on with an assurance that on their first entering the village, they should find the very

animal He needed, and should bring it to Him; that if the owners of the colt, or any one should demand why they thus interfered with what was not their own, they were simply to answer, "The Lord had need of it," and that that reply would produce instant and cheerful obedience to His wishes. All was as Jesus had declared. The disciples went to the little village, found the colt tied, were preparing to unloose and lead it away, were questioned by the owners what they were doing, and replied as they were directed to do, "The Lord hath need of it," and it was instantly surrendered. It may no doubt have been that as Bethany was the town of Martha and Mary and Lazarus, and as the recalling of the latter from the dead had so recently occurred, the name and character of the Lord was well known, and instant obedience would have been accorded to any mandate He had issued; but this in reality makes no difference, and I claim no miracle in the readiness of these owners of the colt to surrender it at the Lord's command. Power no doubt accompanied the word spoken as the Lord opened the heart of Lydia to attend to the things spoken of Paul, and as at this day He opens the heart of many a willing and obedient hearer, nor do I know whether these owners of the ass were disciples of, or believers in Jesus; but, oh! what a constraining motive is here set before them, "The Lord hath need of it." He who had by His Holy Spirit said,

"Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills, all the fowls of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are mine," now abased Himself to say of "a colt the foal of an ass," the Lord hath need of it. What humility and condescension! Had He summoned Herod and his men of war, had He bidden the Roman tyrant from his solitude at Capreæ to come and with his Prætorian guards escort Him as He entered Jerusalem, or had He called down from heaven twelve legions of angels to throng His path, and shout His praise, one might have deemed it more in accordance with the character of the Son of the Most High, who ruleth over all; but not with the character of Him of whom the prophets spake, for He was to be "lowly" and "despised;" "He was not to strive, nor cry, neither should any man hear His voice in the streets."

"The Lord hath need of it." All that I am, all that I have is Thine—Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power. Oh! make us, Lord, willing to give ourselves, and all that we have, when Thou sendest for it. "I have need to be baptized of Thee," said John—and comest Thou to me? Lord! it was Thine own gracious heart that said to him "Suffer it to be so now"—and that deignest to say even of our poor services and hearts, "The Lord hath need of it."

SECTION XCVII.

(Chapter xix. verse 41 to the end.)
Matt. xxi. 1—16. Mark xi. 1—11. John xii. 12—19.

THERE is something most touching in this lamentation of the Saviour over the perishing sinners of Jerusalem. He was indeed "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;" but His sorrows were for others; His grief for those whom He could not save. We shall find in a later chapter that as He was being led to crucifixion, and the women who followed in the mournful company, were weeping around, He turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves, and your children;" He would even check the sympathizing tears of others on His own behalf, and so now, when He had reached the Mount of Olives, from whence the whole expanse of the city was so distinctly visible, and lay spread out before Him as on a map, His tears could not be repressed as He gazed upon it. But they fell, not for Himself, nor for the sufferings that were coming upon Him, but they were alone for the people of that guilty city. Not a word, not an allusion to His own approaching doom; for ought that appears, it would almost seem to be blotted out of His mind in the absorbing interest He felt for the calamities that were coming upon Jerusalem. And yet it was His own death that

was to seal her irrevocable doom—it was in the consummation of that last and awful deed that all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, was to be demanded of that generation, and that they were even at that moment hastening and eager to fill up the measure of their father's guilt by crucifying the Lord of Life. I do not mean to say that it is by any means an uncommon thing for a tender heart to weep over the miseries of a fellow creature. The mere narrative of human sufferings has often drawn tears from human eyes; nay, the fictitious detail of wrought-up woe has worked upon the sensibilities of the human heart, and wrung it into weeping. Nor is it altogether unknown that others have wept over the sins of their unreflecting fellow sinners: David had something of this feeling, when he said, "Mine eyes gush out with tears, because men keep not Thy law," yet even with him there was perhaps something of resentful feeling blended with tender compassion, resentment not for his own wrongs and injuries, so much as for the glory of God. But with Jesus it is all love, love of the purest nature; not one particle of indignation at their hardness of heart, far less of resentment at their rejection of Himself, and the cruel treatment He was to undergo at their hands. And just consider the moment, when these tears fell from His eyes; it was when He was entering Jerusalem in triumph, in the very midst of the shoutings, "Thy

King cometh unto thee," "Hosanna to the Son of David," His all-seeing eye glances onwards to that period, when the same streets should re-echo with the cry, "Down with it, down with it, even to the ground;" and some of those that were then thronging Him, might in that hour of destruction recall His words, and say, "Oh! that we had known in that our day the things belonging to our peace!" Yet from that hour there was no peace for Jerusalem—her "inheritance of peace," as her name signifies, was taken from her, and the vineyard given to other husbandmen. The message of peace and reconciliation was indeed still delivered in her temple and her synagogues, but Jerusalem as a city, Judæa, as a nation, was doomed to be given over as a spoiler to the prey. There is something very awful in this thought, that He who wept to save, who yearned to save, and had power to save, yet did not save. Jerusalem was wept over, but she was left to the just judgment of God. I do not know whether there are tears in heaven —we know that of the blessed inmates in the New Jerusalem it is said, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;" but I fear there is in the heart of God, in the heart of the Lord Jesus, something very like unto the sorrow with which He then gazed upon Jerusalem, and the tears He shed over her, as He now looks down on many a perishing sinner, whose day of grace is passed, into whose closed and hardened heart He knows that no word

of warning will find admission, no message of peace enter. I cannot but think that as there is joy among the angels of God over the sinner that repenteth, so there must be something like sorrow over the sinner that perisheth. If we ourselves knew that there was one whose day of grace was over, who was shut up unto everlasting destruction, should we not feel the deepest emotions of pity, should we not earnestly desire, and even pray that, if it were possible, his cup of doom might pass from him. Is it not so even with the sentence of this world's judgment? Do we not feel the most earnest pity over one appointed to die, and are we not ready to urge every plea, and use every effort that his sentence may be repealed, and his life spared? It is not that man is more merciful than God, far from it, but man's sentence may be reversed; but when the judgment has once passed the Lord's lips, then the things belonging unto man's peace are for ever hidden from his eyes—"there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries." I would say then to you, as Jesus said to the daughters of Jerusalem, "Weep for yourselves, be earnest, be prayerful for yourselves." Your day of grace, blessed be God, is not passed, the Saviour still calls, and is still ready to gather you under His wings of love.

SECTION XCVIII.

(Chapter xx. verse 1—8.)
Matt. xxi. 23—27. Mark xi. 27—33.

It is a melancholy evidence of the perverseness and obduracy of our nature to see these scribes and chief priests exhibiting such hostility against Jesus, whose only offence was, as far as they were concerned, that He taught daily in the temple, and the people were very attentive to hear Him. They might indeed have felt irritated at our Lord's exercising the authority He did in cleansing the temple from that guilty traffic which had so polluted it; but as they had apparently suffered that act to pass unquestioned at the time, we can hardly suppose that they really felt it to be any valid ground of accusation against Him. No doubt it reproached the laxity of their chief priests, who permitted such desecrations to take place in the house of God—no doubt it had galled them to have been found such unfaithful guardians of the Lord's house and the Lord's honour; and some feeling of the kind might be still rankling in their hearts, the more bitter perhaps, because they dared not avow it. The pollution was too glaring, the defiance of God's law too open, and the reference to God's word too triumphant and convincing to be easily gainsayed, and, whatever their feelings may have been, they appear to have passed

over that act of authority in silence. And had Jesus stopped there—had He not so distinctly preached the glad tidings of salvation, which He was commissioned to reveal, had He not by such unequivocal proofs assumed to Himself a power and authority, which so evidently superseded their own and tended to diminsh their own influence, they might have left Him, for a time at least, unmolested. But, stung into fury by His teaching, and seeking by any means they could to stop His preaching, or at least diminish the reverence in which He was so evidently held by the people, they come upon Him suddenly, and with hostile gesture, for so the expression seems to imply, demand by what authority He claimed to act. Jesus might indeed have put them at once to silence by pointing to the mighty works He had done, to their sick healed, and even to their dead raised; but to such an hostile enquiry He would vouchsafe no direct answer. He would however convict them out of their own mouth by demanding of themselves, what they thought of John the Baptist, whether his mission was of divine or human authority? Now an honest answer to that question must at once decide their own enquiry as to His claims and the authority by which He acted, for John testified of Jesus that He was the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world—or, in other words, that He was the Christ, the predicted and the promised One of God. We may

well say of these chief priests that "in the same net that they had laid secretly, is their own foot taken:" they were convinced in their hearts that the mission of the Baptist was from heaven—they were fully aware that he was a messenger sent from God, and they had acknowledged him too as such. The inference to which such an admission must lead was alike clear and inevitable, that the mission of Jesus also was from God. They hesitated not therefore to take shelter in a direct falsehood by avowing that they did not know and could not tell. I do not think that we are likely exactly to fall into this sin of the chief priests and scribes; but I fear that we are all very apt to tamper with religious impressions, when pressed very strongly home, and especially when they come into collision with cherished prejudices, or indulged sin. The doctrine and preaching of Jesus was displeasing to these men, because it laid bare their sin and left them without excuse, and they sought to neutralize its power by questioning its reality and denying the authority of Him who uttered it. But the very authority they chose to doubt was only strengthened by the inference to which Jesus would have led them, and they therefore evaded that also. They were shrewd enough to perceive their difficulty, but had not the honesty to avow it—they were themselves caught on the very horns of the dilemma, on which they sought to fix Jesus. I would caution you especially to beware how you

tamper with the impressions of religious truth, for though it may not lead you to such perilous depths and lengths, as it led these priests and scribes, it is yielding a very dangerous advantage to him, who will seek to lead you farther and farther from Him who alone is the Way, and the Truth, and the life.

SECTION XCIX.

(Chapter xx. verse 9—19.)
Matt. xxi. 33—46. Mark xii. 1—12.

THE meaning and application of this parable is so extremely plain that I need hardly take up much time in pointing out either its application to the Jewish nation, or its more general instruction to ourselves. I would rather take occasion to deduce from it the equally important and awful lesson which it so plainly reads to us, of the hardening tendency of neglecting spiritual privileges, and disregarding and despising the light which the Lord vouchsafes, whether as regards nations or individuals. The Jews indeed as a nation afford a memorable example of this: when their law was first promulgated to them by God Himself, their ready and perhaps at the time sincere reply was, "All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do." But how soon did their obedience evaporate even amid the daily miracles of the wilderness, when

every meal and even every draught of water so especially reminded them of Him, who thus furnished their table in the desert. And after they had entered and taken possession of the land of Canaan in exact fulfilment of the Lord's every promise, no sooner had they eaten and were full, no sooner had the Lord given to them great and goodly cities, which they builded not, and houses full of good things which they filled not, and wells digged which they digged not, and vineyards and olive-trees which they planted not, than they forgat the Lord that brought them forth from the land of Egypt. And so it continued through every generation, with but brief intervals of return to God; each generation outvying the preceding in their disregard and neglect of God and His holy law, till the God of Israel was formally set aside and deposed, like any earthly sovereign, and the worship of Baal and Chemosh and Milcom, and all the abominations of the surrounding nations was substituted for that of Jehovah, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. And yet the Lord in His mercy had not left them unwarned: He had sent them prophets and teachers to recall them by the most tender expostulations, as well as the sternest denunciations. And this parable tells us how they had treated them. And now He had sent unto them His Son, His well-beloved, and they were about to fill up the measure of their iniquities by killing Him, in the vain hope that they

should henceforward be left in undisturbed possession of the inheritance, that no more troublesome messengers would be sent to demand the fruits of the vineyard from them, and their goods should be in peace. And is not the heart of every man, in his natural and unrenewed state, a mere transcript of that of Israel? Is there not the same unwillingness to be disturbed, the same putting away of wholesome and salutary truths, the same resistance to counsel, and dislike to guidance and restraint? And after a little course of disobedience, a little uncontrouled walking in the sight of their own eyes, and the ways of their own heart, that heart has become more hardened, defying, and rebellious; and that which was at first in more gentle and less offensive terms, "Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will send for thee," is changed into the ruder and more abrupt reply, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways." Happy for them if it end not in all the malignity and bitterness of infidelity, and they proceed to say, "What is the Almighty that we should serve Him, and what profit should we have if we pray unto Him?" It is the tendency of sin to spread, till it taints and corrupts the whole soul—like the leprosy, from the first bright spot in the skin, till the plague extend from the head even unto the foot. It was so in this parable, —the first servant was simply beaten, the second was not only beaten, but intreated shamefully,

and the third was mangled, and wounded, and cast out, while the climax of all was that the Son was not merely wounded, not merely cast out, but killed also. Alas! you see in this instance of Israel, and in this shadowing forth in the parable of the growth of sin, what a sad and bitter thing it is to depart from the living God: and that the first step is a sure precursor to a second, till it too often ends, not merely in estrangement and alienation, but in hostility, rebellion, and defiance. It is the very nature of sin to harden the heart, and more especially when that sin is accompanied, as in Israel's case, with gross ingratitude to God for especial tokens of His love and favour. It is indeed a sad evidence of our fallen nature, that it should be so; but I fear an unregenerate man never hates so strongly, as when he hates one whom he has injured and wronged, and from whom he has received only kindness and love. To think upon an injured benefactor is most painful, to remember kindness requited only with ingratitude is most galling; and there is too frequently a studious, and but too often a successful effort to expel the remembrance of such an one from the heart. I believe too that an unregenerate man, who has not the love of God in his heart, even though his lot be cast among the religious, though he enjoy all the privileges of spiritual communion and holy association, is too often only the more hardened. And it is but the natural, nay, it is

the judicial tendency and retribution of despised and neglected privileges to render the heart more callous and averse to God, than if it had never possessed them at all. It is a far more awful darkness, which succeeds to great and glorious light; or, as our Lord said on another occasion, "If the light which is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness!"

SECTION C.

(Chapter xx. verse 20—26.)
Matt. xxii. 15—46. Mark xii. 13—37.

It was a most malignant spirit which induced this ensnaring question, though asked with such apparent sincerity and reverence. The Bible furnishes us with many specimens of the depravity of the human heart; but this is an especially melancholy evidence of its corruption, that it can with such little scruple and remorse, nay, with such pains-taking and design, assume the garb of hypocrisy and reverence to ensnare another, as they hoped to his ruin. It was the guilt of Judas anticipated, when he kissed his Master, but added, "Hold Him fast:" so these men were to "feign themselves just men," burdened and oppressed with a scruple of conscience, and reverentially seeking a solution of their difficulty; but in reality with the foul design to wrest His words, if it were

possible, into an accusation against Him, that they might deliver Him into the power of the governor. The question they asked was, "Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Cæsar or no?" There were no doubt many among the Jews, who would gladly have had a teacher like Jesus releasing them from any such obligation as a tax they hated, and expressing an opinion that it was unlawful to pay tribute to Cæsar. And there are, I fear, many among ourselves who are ever seeking to shelter themselves under the authority of some whom they consider and look up to as qualified to decide, to enable them to evade duties they dislike, and service to which they have no inclination. Could a competent authority be found who should declare it unlawful to pay taxes and could bear him harmless in the refusal, he would have many a follower in the present day. But there are questions far more important than allegiance to an earthly sovereign, or payment of a legal tax, which are too often started under pretence of conscientious enquiry, but which are only the subterfuges of the carnal and corrupt mind seeking to throw off restraint altogether. There are many practices of the world, which are assuredly so inconsistent with the Christian's holy walk, many of its maxims so at variance with the word of God, that nothing but wilful blindness can mistake them, or wilful deafness refuse to listen. But then on the other hand it cannot be denied that there are some far more faintly sha-

dowed out, and though I will not say illegible, yet so much is left as it were to one's own reading and definition, that the natural inclination of the heart to choose the present and prefer the easiest is very apt to mislead. And here it is that in these, what we may call, cases of conscience, when there is a feeling of suspicion that all is not quite right in the choice the heart makes, then indeed recourse is had to the counsel or example of another, not indeed so much to guide to what is right, as to countenance and sanction a continuance in what we wish to follow, but yet fear to be wrong. It is something of the same feeling which might have asked this question of Jesus, not from any desire to know the truth and be guided by it, but to have it in their power to allege an authority which might justify disobedience. It is a very natural and a very proper desire to know the boundary line between right and wrong, between the love of God and the love of the world: and it is well to have it so accurately defined, so distinctly marked out, that you may be in no danger of mistaking; but I would have you guard against the supposition, that you may, without risk or danger, draw close to the one, because the boundary line is actually uncrossed. It is a very dangerous question for a child of God to ask how far he may go with safety —and I should very much doubt the sincerity and the purity of that heart, that could permit itself to draw so close to the forbidden confines, as to

look over the boundary wall and see what is passing beyond, and yet satisfy itself that there is no danger because the feet are on the one side, though the heart and its desires are on the other. "Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar?" is it lawful to go with the world even into what is in itself innocent, but which is hardly compatible with that line of separation, which is the safety line? "All things," said the Apostle, "are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient." There is such a thing as charity to another's soul, and that which may be lawful for me, may not be expedient for him; and charity therefore says, "Put not a stumbling block in a weaker brother's way." I do not indeed think that any one could define for another the line of separation from the world; it is comparatively easy to do it for oneself, if one is really seeking guidance, in all singleness of heart, and seeking it, not from man's erring judgment or still more questionable example, but from Him who guideth into all truth, even the Spirit of Truth. It is a good rule to resolve, not in the spirit, but in the words of him who said, "Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest," not alone to green pastures, and beside still waters, but "whithersoever Thou goest;" though there be a cross not only every day, but every step. Say, with the love of Peter, and with far more of resolution than he then possessed, "I am ready to go with Thee both into prison and to death." "He led Israel by the

right way," though that way was for forty years in a desert; and if you seek counsel of Him with a perfect heart and a willing mind, "He will guide you by His counsel, and after receive you into glory."

SECTION CI.

(Chapter xx. verse 27—44.)
Matt. xxii. 15—46. Mark xii. 13—37.

St. Luke here tells us that the Sadducees denied that there was any resurrection: they were in fact the infidels of that age, and held many other tenets equally at variance with revealed religion. But the Sadducees of our Lord's time are not the only sceptics: there are many Sadducees even now; there are many, even with all the clearer light of the Christian dispensation who still live as if they denied and disbelieved the doctrine of a resurrection from the dead. Nor indeed do I wonder at it: the majority of mankind live so that to them the doctrine of a future existence, and that a state of retribution, must be most unwelcome, and therefore they put it far from them, and would gladly encourage the belief, that the grave is the final receptacle of the departed being; that as the body crumbles into dust, so the spirit, which once animated the living frame, is equally annihilated

by death. According to their creed therefore there can be no day of judgment, no summoning of the dead from their graves, no standing before the tribunal of God, no recompence or remembrance of any work done in the flesh. To many, I doubt not, such a doctrine would be most acceptable: death itself is nothing, but what renders death so awful is the certainty that after death comes the judgment, and that "they that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."

The question of these Sadducees was no doubt well contrived to perplex those whose views were confessedly so imperfect, and whose ignorance of the Scriptures was so great as that of the majority of the Jews in our Lord's days; and in fact in the preceding Gospel He imputes the error to that very ignorance: "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures," I confess however that it is not so much the ignorance of these Sadducees that grates so painfully on my own mind, as it is the flippancy of their question, and the ridicule, as much as the difficulty, which they attempted to throw around the subject. Ridicule, though so dangerous a weapon, is, we know, no test of truth; and, certainly, to speak of a sacred and religious theme, and especially on such an one as the resurrection of the dead, with all its solemn and awful consequences, with a cold sneer upon the lips, as well as infidelity in the heart, is a sad evidence how far

these Sadducees had gone in unbelief. I would expressly warn you, younger ones, to be on your guard, most watchfully on your guard, against any tampering with religious truth, or religious feelings in a spirit of ridicule. To quote Scripture profanely, and at random—to parody passages of holy writ for the sake of an idle laugh, as it is the easiest and poorest of all wit, so I believe it to be a sin of no light kind: and one too, mark me, which in after years brings its own sad but righteous punishment, that when you would, in a far different spirit, take up your Bible to read its blessed truths, the recollection of some idle jest of your youth, the recurrence of some miserable parody breaks in upon you, and mars at once all the comfort and blessing of your work.

Little however as these Sadducees meant it, we have indeed reason to be thankful that their question, malicious and sneering as it was, elicited from Jesus such bright and precious glimpses of the future home and state of the blessed; for it is of them only that our Lord here speaks. And the very phrase which Jesus here uses by which to designate their admission to those eternal mansions reserved in heaven, at once intimates both their title and their meetness for them. "They which are accounted worthy"—they have no worthiness of their own, or in themselves: even of those who present themselves at heaven's gate for admission, their confession, their last prayer must

be, "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified." It was a sweet expression of old Rowland Hill's, as recorded in his biography, that "if he could feel a moment's pang as he entered heaven, it would be at dropping at heaven's gate so old and profitable a companion as repentance." Up to heaven's gate he had need to carry it; it was only as he passed beneath the portal, that as sin, so repentance, would be no more. They are indeed accounted worthy, through the worthiness of another, even Jesus Christ; His perfect righteousness is imputed unto them, and "they are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for their own works or deservings."

And, oh! what a blessed truth is here announced, "They cannot die any more, for they are equal unto the angels." Death hath no more dominion over them any more than it hath over the Captain of their Salvation; "He dieth no more," neither can they that are His. Here, there is continual death, continual partings, and gaps in human brotherhood, which need to be replaced and refilled; there, no separations, no wrenchings asunder, no fillings of the eyes with tears, for "there shall be no more death." And though equal unto the angels in much, yet even to them superior, for there is one chorus in the song of heaven which angels cannot sing. They

may and they do sing, "Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever;" but they cannot add, "For Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood; unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, be glory and dominion for ever and ever."

SECTION CII.

(Chapter xx. verse 45 to the end.)
Mark xii. 38—40.

THE Scribes, of whom Jesus here bids His disciples beware, were the appointed teachers of the law: they sat in Moses' seat as the national ministry of Judæa, the regular expounders of the law of Moses. It is a melancholy character which our Lord here gives them; and much as we justly blame the people for their own ignorance, blindness, and hardness of heart, one must at least pity them that they had such miserable teachers, such blind guides. It was a sad thing for Israel that its watchmen were blind, that they were all ignorant, "dumb dogs that could not bark," or give any sound of warning, or approaching danger. It would almost seem that there had been no change in their character since the prophet uttered this

invective to the hour when Jesus drew this picture of the teachers and pastors of His day. And yet they claimed to be honoured among men, and as they walked along the streets in their flowing robes, expected the lowly obeisance and reverential salutation of all who met them; and if they entered into any house as guests, they equally claimed and received the chief seats and posts of honour as their due. The arrogant Scribe therefore must have listened with peculiar contempt to the lesson of the lowly Jesus, when He said "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart;" and we know that they did express their haughty indignation at that condescension, which could receive sinners, and sit down to meat with publicans.

But there was another feature in their character more base and iniquitous than their haughty arrogance; and here again the prophet, as accurately as Jesus, describes this portion of their character, when he says, "Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough; they all look to their own way, every one for his gain." "They devour widow's houses, and for a show make long prayers." We might have thought indeed that the proud Pharisee and the arrogant Scribe would have been above the taint of covetousness, and especially such covetousness as the Saviour here alludes to, as taking advantage of their pretended righteousness and sanctity of character to inveigle the defenceless

and the feeble into their snares for the purpose of stripping and defrauding them. I am afraid it is the taint of man, and, alas! that I should add, of the priesthood in every age. The prophet Isaiah, nearly 800 years before the coming of Jesus, spoke of them, as "looking every one to his gain." The Saviour denounced the teachers of His day, as making long prayers for a show, but in reality to enable them to devour widows' houses. St. Paul speaks of those who creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins—taking advantage of a burdened conscience to hold up peace and pardon for purchase—and our own annals can testify that priests have lost none of their predecessors' craft even in our times. It has been said that hypocrisy is the homage which vice pays to virtue—I do not believe that hypocrisy has any such end in view for a single moment, and that if self-interest were not at stake, vice would wear her own colours, and blazon her own shame. But of all hypocrisy, religious hypocrisy is the devil's favoured and favourite mask. A man may hide his vices under the semblance of a decent and decorous behaviour, because society, lenient as it is to sin, never tolerates any violation of its own code and rules. A man may conceal a tyrannous and over-bearing temper, ever breaking out and under no restraint at home, under the most specious mildness and suavity abroad, because society, heedless of what

passes under a man's own roof, only stipulates that its own exactions be maintained, and its own quietude not disturbed. But all this is not so much to be called hypocrisy, as the laying aside, for a time and for an end, the natural tempers and dispositions of the heart. It is but little more than using the current coin of a country, where we are travelling for a season, for convenience merely, and because our own would stand in no stead, and be rather an hindrance. In one sense he may be a hypocrite to man, for in deference to man he assumes a garb which is not his own, but which serves his purpose; but still it is far removed from that most despicable hypocrisy in the sight of God, which puts on a garb of religion in order to conceal vice or compass fraud: it seems so to imitate that master device of Satan, when for his own hellish ends he transformed himself even into an angel of light. It has been said, that hypocrites are more in love with the gold of the altar, than with the God of the altar; and it is a most righteous retribution that as their sin is twofold, so will their condemnation be. They have defrauded the fatherless and the widow, and mocked God by hiding their sin under a multitude of prayers.

SECTION CIII.

(Chapter xxi. verse 1—4.)
Mark xii. 41—44.

I DO not know anything that more tends to humble the vain glory and abase the pride of man than the contrast between God's and man's estimate of what is glorious and praiseworthy. We have a striking instance of this in the incident recorded in the verses just read to you. It was customary among the Jews to have a charitable contribution, or as it is here called a "treasury" in the temple, for the due performance of the temple-worship, into which each worshipper put such sums as his piety prompted or his means permitted. It was natural that the wealthy should offer of their abundance, and as no imputation is made against their offerings as scanty or niggard, we may presume that they gave according to their abundance, and that as God had given them an ample earthly store, so from that they returned unto God according as He had given unto them.

The interest of the story, and the lesson deduced from it is in no degree heightened or improved by supposing that the gifts which the rich cast into the treasury were either scanty and unsuited to their station, or that they were the offerings of ostentation or pride. I do not see a single word of censure, either on the amount of their gifts or

the motives of their givers. I look, however, upon this record of the poor widow as intended altogether for the encouragement and strengthening of the poor in their little labours of love; no doubt there is a valuable lesson for the rich also, if they will spell it out, but the lesson for the poor is so plain and legible that he who runs may read. We can hardly picture any condition more destitute than that of this poor widow—her very condition bespeaks the best sympathies of our nature; and I believe that when the Lord said, "Let thy widows trust in Me," it was not so much by direct aid and supplies, such as He did send to the widow of Sarepta, that He promised to befriend them, but by investing the name and the condition of His widowed ones with such interest that the sympathy of every heart should be drawn forth and stirred up for them. Yet this one seems to have been in the very depths of poverty; it is quite unnecessary to enquire the actual value of her earthly possessions—in our own idiom we might say, she had but one halfpenny in the world. She might perhaps be going forth, like that other poor widow, to buy one scanty meal—and then die—at any rate, when she had cast it into the treasury, there was nothing left, it was *all* her living—there was no store at home, no "handful of meal" there, no pittance of "oil in a cruse:" yet her heart rested in God; and probably as her eye rested on a sparrow that had found a house, or the swallow

a nest in some secure precinct of the temple, and she thought of the love that feedeth them, she felt no care, no fear for the future, and cast in her little all with a "Jehovah-Jireh," the Lord will provide, on her lips and in her heart.

There is another trait too pointed out in her character, which we should do well to notice: her little offering was no doubt the smallest and the poorest there—there were the rich with their costly gifts out of their abundance—there were probably also those whom we may call the well-to-do, giving equally according to their means; but among these this poor widow feels no shame to mingle her lowlier and meanest offering. She might have felt such, for many a one does, and many a one withholds, because they think their offering is such as will excite a smile or a remark. But is not this to offer to man? and man no doubt looks at the amount on the plate or in the treasury, and may estimate its value accordingly: but this poor woman gave to God; and though I do not imagine that the contrast, for one moment, ever entered her thoughts, it was her all; "she had done what she could;" and he who looketh on the heart pronounced her least the greatest of all. "My thoughts are not as your thoughts, saith the Lord."

It is a great encouragement to the poorest of us to do what we can; it is not merely this poor widow, or other poor widows, it is not the Apostles

of Jesus only, who have to say of this world's goods, "Silver and gold have I none:" and if Christian charity and benevolence consisted in the abundance of the things that a man either hath or giveth away, then we might indeed say that by far the larger portion of the Lord's family had neither part nor lot in the matter. But this incident, and the selection of two equally destitute widows to sustain the Lord's prophets in their necessities, and the assurance, that even a cup of cold water only given in the name of Jesus is accepted of Him, sweetly intimates, that even in this respect also, "Blessed are the poor." There is something touchingly appropriate to our subject in that little episode of Dorcas in the Acts of the Apostles. She too appears to have been a woman of comparatively a humble condition of life, little known perhaps beyond the immediate circle in which she lived in the seaport town of Joppa; and yet it is of her that the Holy Ghost has condescended to give such a pleasing testimony to her worth, in the making of garments for the poor, and the needy, and the widow in their distress. A very humble occupation we may think; but it is just that unostentatious method of doing good, which the Holy Spirit has recorded: and be assured there is no station so lowly but it affords means of usefulness, and that God takes notice of those little acts of humanity and kindness. Silver and gold may be the lot of few; but a needle and

thread were the implements with which Dorcas served the Lord in her generation: and how far more ennobling such a testimony in God's own record, than all the worsted and crochet work of the trifiers of our days.

SECTION CIV.

(Chapter xxi. verse 5—19.)
Matt. 24. Mark 13.

We have here another striking illustration of the Lord's own declaration, "My thoughts are not as your thoughts, neither are my ways as your ways." What a contrast is here presented to us of man's estimate of human glory and earthly grandeur, and God's purposes concerning it! His disciples were calling their Master's attention to the magnificence of their temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts. It was a natural subject of pride and exultation in a Jewish heart; and no doubt these disciples shared in the common feelings of pride respecting it with the rest of their countrymen. What a death blow to all their proud fancies must the answer of Jesus have been! "As for these things, which ye behold, the days will come in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down." It was something of a similar feeling with which

Nebuchadnezzar is described by the prophet as walking on the roof of his palace, and surveying from its height the vast expanse of the city that lay before him, and in the pride of his heart exclaiming, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty? And while the word was yet in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, 'O king, Nebuchadnezzar, to thee is it spoken, the kingdom is departed from thee.'" It is the natural feeling of man's heart, not indeed that he himself shall continue for ever; but to build up a name and a place that shall endure through all generations. It was a very early piece of vanity, for David, speaking of some in his days, says, "Their inward thought is that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations; they call the lands after their own names." And with the same result, for he adds, "Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish." The Psalmist's comment on this conduct is very remarkable: "This their way is their folly, yet their posterity approve their saying." And how true this is, for men have gone on exactly in the same way, thinking their houses shall continue for ever, and calling them after their own names, whereas God has written decay on every work of man. Individuals no doubt quickly perish, but families however great or however prosperous be-

come extinct also, dynasties and thrones alike disappear, and nations themselves in their appointed time are swept away, and, like the mighty empires of old times, leave scarcely a trace behind; and of some we may say with the Psalmist, even "their memorial is perished with them." Nay more—we are assured, "the heavens and the earth, which are now, are reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." It is not the temple of Jerusalem alone, with all its proud magnificence and goodly gifts, on which the Lord with unerring lips pronounced the righteous doom of destruction—by the same word is it declared, that "the heavens themselves shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up." It was a natural, though an unprofitable, desire in these apostles to know the exact period when this threatened destruction of Jerusalem should arise; and there is the same earnestness now to lift the veil that hides futurity from our sight. And I believe that as the time approaches, that earnestness assumes a far more intense and solemn aspect in the minds of men—of those, I mean, who are waiting and looking for the coming of their Lord. It was so in the days of the aged Simeon and Anna; they were "waiting for the consolation of Israel, and looking for the redemption in Jerusalem:" and, as in the days preceding the destruc-

tion of the holy city, signs of fearful import were multiplied everywhere, "men's hearts failing them for fear," so at the present moment, amid so much to sorrow over, amid so much that seems to announce that the perilous "sifting" of the nations is near at hand, we may, in many of the signs around us hear the voice of the coming Jesus saying to His elect, "Look up, and lift up your hearts, for your redemption draweth nigh." It is however to ourselves a far more practical and profitable and immediate inference which the apostle deduces from these reflections, when he adds, "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God." "We know that our earthly house of this tabernacle must be dissolved;" and it may be a time of much tribulation, and much suffering, there may be much cause to "groan, being burdened;" but "tribulation worketh patience," and it is the sweet injunction of Jesus, in the midst of tribulation, "In your patience possess ye your souls."

SECTION CV.

(Chapter xxi. verse 20—28.)
Matt. xxiv. Mark xiii.

THESE predictions of sorrow and destruction

against Jerusalem, though expressed in general and almost figurative terms, are yet indicative of sufferings of no common character: and what renders them so singularly striking is, that every tittle of vengeance and of suffering that fell on that devoted city and country was in order "that all things that are written might be fulfilled." We must not indeed imagine that the Almighty uttered the prediction, and then sent the suffering in order to fulfil it: but known unto God are all His works from the beginning, and even before the settlement of Israel in the promised land, before they had any country, any city, or any temple, while, as the Psalmist expresses it, "they were yet wanderers in the wilderness in a solitary way, and found no city to dwell in," even then the Lord, by the mouth of His servant Moses, 1500 years before these denunciations were spoken by Jesus, gave utterance to the most fearful predictions, and that most accurate and minute detail of every calamity that could rend the human heart, or torture the human frame. Well might the Lord in His tender compassion exclaim, "Woe unto them that give suck in those days;" for the prophet distinctly declares that amid the horrors of the siege, and the cravings of famine, even the tender and delicate mother should devour the babe of her bosom—and the historian of the siege records the sad and appalling fact that such was the case. But it is not necessary to go through the

detail of the unparalleled sufferings that befell that unhappy city during its siege, and consequent upon the capture of it: it is sufficient to say that all the atrocities that could emanate from the most unbridled passions and fiercest animosities of the besieged among themselves, and the exasperated rage of their enemies without from their lengthened resistance, seem to have accumulated horrors, never before practised, save upon that doomed and guilty city. It was indeed the days of vengeance: all the blood that had been shed within it, nay, all the blood of the Church that had been poured out upon the earth, through her successive generations, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Jesus Himself and His latest martyr in Jerusalem, was to be exacted of the generation that then lived, in whose ears Jesus was then uttering these words. And yet the denunciation made no impression on the guilty nation: we might say of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, her princes, and her priests, as was said of Jehoiakim when Jehudi read the prophet's roll in his ears, and he cut it to pieces with his penknife and consumed it in the fire that was on the hearth, "And yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard his words." Do we wonder at their obduracy and infatuation? and are we ready to say: "If we had lived in their days we would not have consented unto their deeds?" Do you really think that the

Almighty's denunciations of His wrath and impending judgments against sin, would find a softer soil in our hearts than the callous heart of stone which was in the Jew? I believe nothing of the kind; there are as distinct and awful and unerring threatenings of eternal wrath against the sinner now, as there were of temporal vengeance against the Jew. Does the sinner heed them? Not a whit; he still goes on his way, either disbelieving or disregarding. He is told, "The soul that sinneth it shall die:" "All the people that forget God shall be turned into hell:" "The smoke of their torment ascendeth for ever:" "Their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched:" "There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Not one sinner in a thousand believes it, or ever acts upon the belief—or if he does give credit to it, it is simply to the extent that it will fall upon another, and not upon his own soul, and that he has some effectual way by which he can escape the just judgment of God. Let these sinners of Jerusalem however testify to their own miserable incredulity, and the sinner's equally fatal unbelief.

And yet the most wonderful part of these predictions is not what was accomplished by the Roman armies—it is not the utter desolation that should befall Jerusalem, nor that of the once magnificent and costly temple not one stone should be left upon another, and that it should be trodden down of the Gentiles—all of which was literally

fulfilled; but it is that there is a period fixed to this desolation; there is a time, when the waters of God's wrath shall no longer flow in upon Jerusalem, and that "glory of all lands" become once more the favoured seat of the Lord and His anointed. It is when the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled. Seventy years were the limits of the first captivity; far more than seventy times seven have rolled away, and Israel is still a wanderer, and Judah an outcast. But the Lord has not forgotten His promise, nor even is He slack, as men count slackness, to fulfil it. The Jew, like the rainbow in the heaven, is still God's faithful witness on earth; and sooner shall seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night pass away than God's promise, which He spake to Abraham and his seed for ever. The rainbow in the heavens has seen empire after empire pass away, and the Jew has seen the same from his earliest foes of Amalek, and Sihon the Amorite; and as the rainbow is still the pledge and the herald of God's forgiving love to a guilty world, so the Jew is still the living witness of God's predicted mercy to his own guilty but not *forsaken* race.

SECTION CVI.

(Chapter xxi. verse 29 to the end.)
Matt. xxiv. Mark xiii.

After such an enumeration of calamities and sufferings that were to fall upon Jerusalem, and the devoted race of Israel—sufferings at which humanity shudders even in the recital or perusal of them, there is something peculiarly refreshing and touching in the imagery which our Lord here draws from an object of nature, no doubt before His eyes at the moment He spoke. It is worth notice how continually Jesus refers to objects of rural life, as if in them he felt peculiar interest and delight: and one loves to think of the tender Jesus and compassionate Redeemer, in His sad and sorrowing passage through this vale of tears, gazing as man with admiration and delight on the beauties of that world He had Himself created. At the moment of creation indeed, when everything sprang into being in all the freshness of existence from their Creator's hands, one is not surprised to read that "God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good." Yet of that same earth He had afterwards said, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee." And now He, "by whom all things were made, and without whom was not anything made that was made," while sojourning

on this earth as a man of sorrows, seems to have soothed His own spirit, and to have felt peculiar interest in deriving lessons of instruction and spiritual application from the beauteous products of that earth He had before pronounced "cursed.' In the very beginning of His ministry, you remember He calls on His disciples to admire the hues and tints of the gorgeous eastern lily, declaring that even Solomon, the most magnificent monarch of the world, in the very height of his glory, was not arrayed like one of them. I need not specify how it was, from that interesting sight of a sower scattering his seed upon his land, that He deduced some of the most valuable lessons He has left on record; and so here, now at the close of that ministry, after detailing, no doubt, with a sorrowing heart, the miseries that would so shortly come upon Jerusalem, and from which He would, oh! how gladly! have sheltered her even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, He points to the fig-trees, that, with the vines, grew around Him, as He sat on the Mount of Olives, and reminds His disciples that as they could discern the approaching season of summer from the well-known and unerring signs of vegetation in the trees of the field or the garden, so they might calculate with equal precision the coming of the predicted vengeance from the signs He had pointed out. I do not know that our Lord meant us to draw a lesson for our own imitation in this ob-

servation of the objects of nature, that lie so abundantly scattered along our path; but I am sure of this, that an eye peculiarly alive to such, and a heart sensitively open to such impressions, will find in every walk, however lonely, or however apparently barren, along every hedge-row, and in every copse, in every field, and beneath every clod, such manifestations and revelations of the Lord's tender providence and superintending care, as, if he reads them aright, will send him home a holier and a more grateful man. Nay, more, the truly religious can hardly turn his eyes on any animate or inanimate object of nature without their recalling to his heart the Saviour whom he loves, from the lamb, the emblem of His meekness and the type of His atonement, to the very worm beneath His feet, to which the humble Saviour disdained not to liken Himself, when He said "I am as a worm."

There are however other signs than those of inanimate nature, which the Lord in His love has scattered about our path, and to which we should do well to take heed. The day of Jerusalem has come, and her glory is in the dust: but there is a similar warning to each of us, "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return." It was the Lord's complaint even of His dear child, that "grey hairs were here and there upon Ephraim, and he knew it not." And is it not continually so; are we not ever closing our eyes against the

marks and tokens by which God reminds us of the lapse of life.

In our own circle we comprise the allotted periods of human existence, the young, the middle aged, and the old. You may think grey hairs belong only to the old—it is quite true, they do; but the note of time belongs to all, and it is as incumbent on the youngest to mark how silently yet how rapidly days mount up to years—how stealthily, yet how surely, childhood passes into youth—and youth, now so buoyant and full of hope, will, ere long, find grey hairs stealing upon him, as upon the oldest among ourselves.

SECTION CVII.

(Chapter xxii. verse 1—6.)

THE hour had now come which from eternity had been appointed in the councils of heaven for the redemption of man. It was indeed the day of vengeance as regarded the Victim who was about to die for man; but it was the year of the Lord's redeemed. It was the very month too of Israel's deliverance from the bondage of Egypt, and the very day, on the night of which the blood of the lamb had been sprinkled on the houses of the Israelites as a pledge of safety, and an assurance that the angel on his errand of destruction should

pass over every door where that blood was sprinkled. Till this hour had come, the chief priests, and Scribes, and Pharisees had sought for opportunity to put Jesus to death, and would willingly have gained their end by any means; and though Jesus by His uncompromising denunciations had exasperated their fury to the utmost, yet their hands were stayed. Nay, more than this; though Satan himself knew that the perilous conflict for his own supremacy was now at hand, and that the prophecy, to which he had no doubt himself been an unwilling listener in the garden of Eden, was now about to be fulfilled or defeated, and though he would long ago, had he had the power, have destroyed Jesus, yet up to this moment Satan himself is as powerless, and as fully checked, and restrained, and held in with bit and bridle as either Pharisee or priest. Neither earth's malice, nor hell's malignity could do ought, till God's appointed hour had come. That hour *had* now come, and how instantly does everything combine to further their wicked purposes! Even the very people whom they feared are wrought upon to take their side.

It is a very fearful expression which the evangelist here uses, "Then entered Satan into Judas"—"entered" as a conqueror to take possession of his heart—"entered as an owner into the rightful possession of that heart, which had always been his, though it had for a time exhibited fealty and allegiance to another. He had no doubt made

overtures before, he had insinuated doubts and suspicions as to the worldly wisdom of his engagement with Jesus to be His disciple, and had suggested the advantages of a bargain with His enemies; and as Judas had once given admission to the negotiation, and yielded to the first overture, we are not surprised that he soon followed up his advantage, and now "entered" without disturbance and without scruple as a purchaser of that heart, which the miserable trafficker had covenanted to sell. It is a similar expression, though more striking in its Hebraism, which Peter uses to Ananias, "Why hath Satan *filled* thine heart?" as if so occupied by the device and the desire of accomplishing the fraud he contemplated, that no other thought or feeling could find admission or room in that pre-occupied heart. And it is perhaps singular that as in Judas, so in Ananias Satan found a covetous heart the most easy to enter, and a love of money the most ready to be moulded to his purpose. And yet we must not attribute too much to Satan, as if he were the sole agent, and author, and instigator, to all that is wrong: in the case of Ananias, Peter adds, "Why hast thou conceived this in thine heart?" Satan no doubt sows the seed, but he finds a soil in many a heart ready prepared and fitted to receive it; he looks into many a habitation and finds it swept and garnished for his use; he sets many a snare, and tries many a device to allure, but it is after all the

bird's own wings that must convey it to the net: and so "every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed."

It was through the eye that Satan found admission into Eve's heart—she had already looked upon the fruit, and saw that it was pleasant to the eye; and many a one, like Achan, has handled the wedge of gold, whose next work was to steal it. It is by yielding to the first suggestions that Satan is emboldened to make further advances; and as it has been well said, if you crush the egg, you need not fear the flight of the bird.* If you are on the watch to warn Satan off the very moment he sets foot on your premises, depend upon it he will get no footing there. But he is a very Pharaoh in his exactions, the hardest of all task-masters—and if he can induce you to go with him one mile of your own accord, you may rely upon it, that, like an eastern messenger, or courier, he will force you into his service, and compel you to go twain. Judas had probably expelled devils from others, he could not expel the demon of covetousness from his own heart: and so we read that Satan entered into him, and led him captive at his will.

* Secker's *Nonsuch Professor.*

SECTION CVIII.

(Chapter xxii. verse 7—18.)
Matt. xxvi. 17—30. Mark xiv. 12—26.

THE disciples of our Lord had so often seen every declaration of their Master so literally fulfilled, every promise and assurance so amply realized, both when they were sent on their commission to preach the kingdom in the various cities of Israel, and still more recently when He sent them for the ass's colt, on which He was to make His predicted and triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, and Peter and John had been such favoured witnesses of their Master's divine glory, that they never seemed to have doubted, that, sent as they were on their present errand, they should once more find every tittle of His word fulfilled to the very letter. It is not however so much the fact of the householder's instant compliance with the request for a guest-chamber, in which to eat the passover, for it would have been contrary to Jewish custom to have denied its use. At the season of the passover every house was, as it were, thrown open, and those from the more distant provinces were welcome to accommodation even in a stranger's house. It was therefore no part of the divine prescience of Jesus to foretell that Himself or His disciples would find one in the city ready to afford them a guest-chamber. And there can be little doubt I

ık that the title under which Jesus asked the dness, that of Master or Teacher, was one both ›wn and revered by many even in Jerusalem, l would of itself secure instant compliance. But nitting all this, it was a most wonderful exhibi- ı of divine knowledge and foresight that could cribe so minutely the means by which they ıld be directed to the very house He intended occupy—means, too, so liable to interruption, ıppointment or delay. He tells them that as y should enter Jerusalem, they should see a vant or slave, bearing a pitcher of water, and t, without addressing him, they should follow steps to the very house he should enter, and t as the master of the house met them, they ıld ask in Jesus' name for the room in which should eat the passover. The very room too accurately described, though there can be no ıbt that Jesus had never seen it; it was to be a ge upper room, already furnished and laid out ording to the Jewish ritual, for the celebration he festival—and there they were to make ready the appointed hour of the Paschal Supper, en He would arrive with the rest of His dis- les. It was the last passover at which Jesus ıld ever preside, would sit down with those om He disdained not to call His friends. He ew that the appointed hour of His suffering and ıth was at hand—He knew the compact that l been entered into with His treacherous dis-

ciple by the chief priests, and that that very night was the time fixed for the consummation of his perfidy. And yet "with desire have I desired to eat this passover, though it usher Me to torture and to death." It was for this cause that He came into the world, it was this baptism of blood with which He had consented to be baptized, and His very spirit was straitened, it was eagerly going forth in its longing desire to accomplish the work, which His Father had given Him to do, and He had covenanted to undertake for man's redemption; and as in this Paschal Supper He took "the cup of blessing" or "thanksgiving," He gave thanks even for that cup of suffering, which was so soon to follow. His earthly work as a teacher was now at an end—He was no longer to traverse their streets or villages on His errands of mercy and healing—there was to be no more the living pattern and example of lowliness and meekness before their eyes; even the social fellowship with His disciples, whether in their daily meals, or in the ordinances of religious worship, was now to be at an end, and with this passover He would cease to mingle among them as He had hitherto done. He had finished the work His Father had given Him to do. He would henceforth drink no more of the fruit of the vine in any Paschal ordinance: the very institution itself with all its hallowed associations and sanctities of 1500 years was to be done away and merged in the reality of that

sacrifice of which it was only the type, and the shedding forth of that blood without which there could be no remission of sin. Yet as the Lord had said "I will not leave you comfortless," so now did He in His loving-kindness intimate a reunion, which should never be dissolved, a period when they should come to the Jesus whom they loved, "the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than that of Abel," and telleth of a more perfect and complete remission and washing away of sin than the blood of the lamb slain in typical sacrifice. "I will not drink," saith our Lord, "of the fruit of the vine, till the kingdom of God shall come," and as St. Matthew more touchingly records the words, "till I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." They are equivalent expressions indeed—but oh, what a blessed and comprehensive truth is shadowed out here! "*Till I drink it new*"—old things are passed away, all things are become new, a new heaven and a new earth — "*With you*" — of them that thou hast given me have I lost none; where I am, there shall ye be also—"*In My Father's kingdom,*" I go to prepare a place for you: in my Father's house are many mansions—I am not yet ascended —but, I ascend unto My Father and your Father, unto My God, and your God.

SECTION CIX.

(Chapter xxii. verses 19, 20.)
Matt. xxvi. 20—30. Mark xiv. 17—26.

THESE two verses record the institution of the Lord's Supper: and so immediately succeeding as it did the Paschal Supper, and with the same simple elements which were then upon the table, it is quite evident from the words of Jesus that He intended it to supply the place of the former. The end of the Passover was now accomplished; before another anniversary came round, the true Paschal Lamb would be sacrificed, His blood would be shed, and His body broken on the cross. The type, the shadow, therefore, was to depart, before the one all-sufficient sacrifice, satisfaction and atonement. Yet Jesus desired to leave to His followers in every age, an institution that should remind them of the great things He had done for them; and therefore simply taking a piece of the bread that was on the Paschal Table, He brake it into various pieces, and giving one to each of His disciples He bade them take it as an emblem of His body about to be broken on the cross, and to eat it in remembrance of Him. And the same likewise with the wine that was on the table; He handed that round to His disciples in token of and as an emblem of His blood about to be poured out: and this they were to do in testi-

mony of the covenant sealed in that blood, which was shed for them. It is only in this Gospel of St. Luke that we find the words, "Do this in remembrance of Me," and assuredly more touching words could hardly have been uttered by the dying Saviour, a more soul-binding charge could hardly have been bequeathed to man. I do not of course mean to say that all in the Lord's supper is confined solely to a commemoration of His dying love, for there are other and most important ends answered and carried out in its institution; but it is as a memorial of the love of Jesus, as a memorial of what He did and suffered for us, and in remembrance of the sins which nailed Him to the cross, that these words of Luke seem to invite us. "Do this in remembrance of Me." Can any words be more simple and intelligible? Is there a single living being, from the youngest child in an infant school, that does not understand the meaning of the sentence? In fact, out of the six words of which the sentence is composed, five are words of one syllable, and four of those syllable words of two letters only. It would be impossible to select or put together a sentence so intelligible and easy to the meanest understanding, and yet so full of comprehensiveness to the most exalted. It is not therefore from any mystery in the words, from any difficulty in understanding them, that so many are found to shrink from that which, one would have thought, would have

been the dearest and most precious privilege of a Christian disciple on earth till he too should sit down at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, and with his Lord drink it new in His Father's kingdom. What is it, which Jesus bids us remember? Not merely His dying agonies, not merely the torture and the shame—but the love which led Him to the cross, the love which in reality nailed Him there—the love which, when there was no other way for man's redemption, drew from Him the willing and the instant offer, "Lo, I come; in the volume of the Book it is written of Me. I delight to do Thy will, O My God, yea, Thy law is within My heart." His blood was indeed shed; but He Himself tells us, it was shed for us, and it is in this the true sacrifice that there is a remembrance again made of sins every time it is commemorated. And is it that we are indifferent to and unwilling to remember the love that died for us; and that our hearts say of it, "There is no beauty in it that we should desire?" Jesus might say of His love, as the prophet said of the sorrow of Jerusalem, "All ye that pass by, behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger." Surely, "greater love hath no man than this, than that a man lay down his life for his friends," and "peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die, but God commendeth *His* love toward us, in that while we

were yet sinners Christ died for us." When I have seen persons turning away from the Lord's Supper, as if it were a matter of indifference, as if the invitation conferred no privilege nor blessing, and the refusal involved no responsibility, no sin, no ingratitude, and when I have heard them defend their conduct, as one often does, as if in reality they were choosing only the safest course, I have often thought that if Jesus were to turn as deaf an ear and as callous a heart to our calls, as we do to His, what would become of us! Had He, for instance, when the poor thief upon the cross said, "Lord, remember me," coldly turned away from him, there would have been no "paradise" for that sinner's soul. And do we think that even in heaven He feels no pang, when to His appeal "Do this in remembrance of Me," man, the very being for whom He suffered and died, turns away in contemptuous indifference or guilty disdain.

"According to Thy gracious word,
In meek humility,
This will I do, my dying Lord,
I will remember Thee.

"Thy body broken for my sake,
My bread from heaven shall be,
Thy testamental cup I take,
And thus *remember Thee.*

* * * * *

"And when these failing lips grow dumb,
And mind and memory flee,
When Thou shalt in Thy kingdom come,
Jesus, *remember me.*"

SECTION CX.

(Chapter xxii. verse 21—30.)
Matt. xxvi. 31—35. Mark xiv. 27—31.

THERE can be, I think, but little doubt that the whole of this passage which I have just read to you is wrongly placed, and that it should have preceded, instead of following, the institution of the Lord's Supper. Or, if we be unwilling to have recourse to such a transposition of the sacred text, we must conclude the passage to be parenthetical, and that the evangelist interrupts his narrative to introduce an incident which he omitted in its proper place; and, assuredly the words, "There was also a strife among them," may with equal correctness be rendered, "There *had been* a strife among them." There can be little doubt however as to the fact that our Lord's declaration that one of the twelve should betray Him, assuredly preceded the breaking of the sacramental bread, and the drinking of the sacramental wine. We find from the other evangelists that previous to the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus had announced the fact of treachery among their number, and, as John continues the narrative, when pressed

by that beloved disciple to tell him who the traitor was, Jesus said to him apart and unheard by the rest, "He it is to whom I shall give a sop when I have dipped it," and when He had dipped it, He gave it to Judas Iscariot; and John distinctly adds, "He then having received the sop, went immediately out." And this I think at once decides the question whether Judas was present and partook with the rest in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. If the announcement of the intended betrayal preceded the institution of the Eucharist, as St. Matthew says it did; and the enquiry by John as to whom it should be, and the answer by Jesus with the handing of the sop to Judas immediately followed, as St. John says they did; and Judas immediately quitted the table and the room to prepare for and carry out his intended nefarious plot, then I think we can have no doubt that Judas was not present at the Lord's Supper. And though I do not know that one's own *feelings* as to the right or wrong, the propriety or impropriety of the act can have, or ought to have, any weight in the decision of a scriptural truth, yet there is something so abhorrent to one's feelings in the supposition that Judas, the known and detected traitor, was a permitted guest at that sacramental table, that I confess I feel relieved from a painful weight in the belief and the assurance that Judas was not present. I know that much has been very strongly and plausibly urged

for the contrary opinion; and it has been said by one able commentator, that many a traitor, many an ungodly, immoral, and profane person may be found at the present day at the Lord's Supper, and that no amount of vigilance or discipline can guard against such profanation and intrusion. It is unhappily quite true; many a child of the devil, I fear, often intrudes there—many a hypocrite, I suspect, partakes at that table for purposes of his own base interest, and to blind the eyes of his fellow-creatures; and many a one too from no love to Jesus, and no remembrance of *His* love. Nor, alas! alas! is it altogether untrue, that some may peradventure be found, who minister about holy things with unhallowed hands and unholy hearts—we cannot deny it, however we may mourn over it: but I cannot see that this charge or the admission of its truth has any bearing on the question. Judas was a known and detected traitor—not indeed in the eyes of his fellow disciples and communicants; but in the eyes of Him, who ordained and ministered at that holy feast. Jesus knew his treachery—named it—and to his own appeal whether he was the man, answered "Thou hast said." Could He then with this knowledge of one, of whom so immediately afterwards He said, "Not one is lost, save this son of perdition," could He, as He handed the bread to him say, "This is my body which is given for *you*," or as He gave the cup, "This cup is the New Testa-

ment, in my blood which is shed for *you?*" As far as human precaution can avail to exclude a notorious sinner, or one that hath done wrong to a neighbour, our Church does forbid, till he repent and amend; and certainly every Protestant branch of the Church of Christ does exercise a vigilant and holy jealousy over those whom she admits to a participation in the Lord's Supper. But we cannot judge of the heart, we cannot usurp God's prerogative, and bid all desires and all secrets of the heart lie open before us. We can only warn and exhort and counsel—and on their own souls be the guilt of those, who, with sin cherished in the heart and indulged in the life, yet presume to eat and to drink at that table to their own condemnation.

SECTION CXI.

(Chapter xxii. verse 31—34.)

THERE is something very fearful in the declaration which our Lord here makes of the malignant and hellish purposes of Satan. It may be that we have hardly realized the existence of this unseen foe; that, though we have felt his power, and perhaps yielded to his suggestions, we have ascribed the effect to other agency, our own passions, our own frailty, or the enticements of others, of worldly

friends and associates. We have read no doubt of such a being as Satan, as the great enemy of the human race, and in our baptism it was covenanted for us that we should "manfully fight under Christ's banner against sin, the world, and the devil;" but we have perhaps suffered ourselves to doubt of his existence, and have resolved all those passages of Scripture, in which he is spoken of, as allegorical or figurative representations of great and powerful temptation.

There is, I fear, a generally increasing disbelief, not so much in this country, as among the Rationalists of Germany, and the youth of that country, in the existence of any such created spirit as Satan, permitted to roam over the earth, and to exercise such fatal sovereignty over so many human souls. I would just recall to your minds the words of our Lord Himself in this passage of Scripture, which I have now read to you—they are the words of Him who is "The Truth," and who "cannot lie"—they are the declaration of Him who was manifested for this very purpose that He might destroy the works of the devil—and who had Himself grappled in close and personal but triumphant conflict with the very being of whom He here speaks, and of whom He tells Simon with such fearful reiteration, "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat." Is there anything in these plain and simple but appalling words to lead one to suppose

that Jesus spoke here only figuratively, that He did not really speak of one who had an actual existence, and who felt actual desires; and who, moreover, was at the very moment actually gloating over that little band with the most earnest longing and desire to make them all his prey. For the words, "Satan hath desired to have *you*," do not apply to Peter only, but to all the disciples assembled around that sacramental table. The word in the original is in the plural and refers to all; and can we doubt the hellish eagerness of that most insatiate foe to get all within his grasp? He had found Jesus invulnerable Himself, he would therefore now wound Him "in the house of His friends," through the misconduct of those whom He loved and trusted. He had succeeded with one—he had already "entered into Judas"—and he saw enough of the over-weening confidence and presumptuous self-reliance of another—and of the timid fears and cowardice of the rest to encourage the hope that he might gain his purpose with all. And, humanly speaking, how nearly had he succeeded! how nearly had he made shipwreck of the love and faith of all! and had they not been shielded by that panoply of a Saviour's prayer, which, though for a moment withdrawn to shew them how powerless in themselves they were, yet still "compassed them as with a shield," they too, like Judas, would have found Satan, as Job expresses it, "running upon them as a giant." I

would then earnestly warn you against admitting, even for a single moment, a suggestion that there is no such being as Satan—your enemy, and my enemy—and who will never abate one jot of his enmity and wrath as long as there are human souls to seduce and ruin. Depend upon it, if such a suggestion enters your mind, it is put there by himself. You may say indeed, that would be but "Satan casting out Satan" over again, for Satan to induce you to believe there is no such spirit as himself. He knows better; he knows that such a creed would be his strongest hold, and his easiest bait. Disbelieve a devil, and you disbelieve hell; disbelieve a hell, and of course hell's torments go with it—a day of judgment soon follows—all fear of sin vanishes, all need of redemption or deliverance from it—the blood of Jesus, the blood of the covenant is counted an unholy or a common thing—every barrier and every fence is broken down, and infidelity in its worst and wildest shapes is but the inevitable progress of one such suggestion taking root in the sinner's heart.

SECTION CXII.

(Chapter xxii. verse 35—38.)

I DO not know any verse in Scripture that comes home to my own feelings so touchingly as the first verse I have just read to you, or which so beau-

tifully reveals the tender providence and loving kindness of our Lord, or so feelingly portrays our own destitute and helpless condition. It is indeed a simple question which Jesus asks, and the answer is comprised in but one word—yet how much does both the question and the answer comprise! "When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, Nothing." It was indeed literally true as regarded these disciples. Sent forth on their mission through the various towns and villages of Judæa and Galilee, without provision for the way, without even the usual supplies or the commonest necessaries which the provident traveller would take with him, they had yet found every promise of their Lord fulfilled: not merely the wants of to-day, but the wants of to-morrow—the wants of each day provided, as each day dawned upon them: and, at the close, what a testimony to that providence of God which never failed, however urgent the need, however doubtful the means, or precarious the supply! Like the widow's cruse and the widow's meal, which never failed as long as a prophet of the Lord needed its supply. "Lacked ye anything? And they said, Nothing." I believe it will be found equally true with life's lengthened pilgrimage and journey as with the shorter errand of these few disciples. I believe that at the close, when the veil is removed, and one sees the whole of the way by which the Lord hath led us through the

wilderness, though there may have been some occasional sinking of the heart, some momentary despondency and depression, like David's, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul;" or, it may be even some murmuring, as if the Lord had been dealing unkindly, as when Jacob said, "All these things are against me," still, I do firmly believe, that as each child of the family reaches his father's home in heaven, and is safely housed there, and the Saviour asks of each, "Lacked ye anything in your way hither?" the instant answer of every grateful heart would be, "Nothing." It was among no friendly people that these disciples were sent; they were to anticipate not merely opposition, but persecution, and they were to go forth without purse, or scrip, or shoes; as destitute at their setting out as the poor prodigal was at his return, save that they had the promise and the arm of an absent Saviour on which to rest and lean. And is not the child of God in this world as apparently in the same helpless condition—wending his way amid no friendly people, harassed by enemies on every side, and having in himself and from himself no means of supply—"no purse, no scrip, no shoes?" And yet provision is sent for each day's need—"as the day is, so is the strength" supplied: there may come a day of heavy trial, of sore bereavement, of shaken faith, in which you may be tempted to say with one of old, "All thy waves are gone over me;" and of which, if a thought of such a day had

ever crossed your mind, you would have said, "It would be greater than I am able to bear." Yet it has come, and the fires have not harmed you, neither the waters overflowed you. And not only that, but by the Lord's gracious alchemy, the very trial becomes nutriment, the very affliction turns out to be provision for the way. It was so with David; he said of his troubles, "It is good for me that I have been in trouble; before I was troubled, I went wrong, but *now*, have I kept Thy way:" and the testimony of every child of God will be in the end, that "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," yea, and supporteth and guideth by chastening. It is in fact our Father's purpose to draw us away from earthly props and staffs—and earthly wells—and earthly resting-places—to lean solely on Him, and to look up to Him for our daily strength as well as provision. I could not say of any earthly comfort, or any human blessing that it had supplied every need—even of the dearest, the closest, the purest, the least alloyed, and the most enriched, were one asked, "Lackedst thou anything in it?" I should still feel there was a void unfilled, a desire unsatisfied, and yet that very lack, that very void, is part of God's provision for the way, leading one away from the creature to rest more and more firmly on the Creator; so true is it what the Bible says, that "All things work together for good to them that love God;" and so, as "He brings us out of the

mire and clay and sets our feet upon the rock, He puts a new song into our mouth, even a thanksgiving unto our God."

How sweetly is all this shadowed out in this passage of Scripture now before us! Could any proposition, humanly speaking, be more preposterous by way of defence against an armed band of officers and men, avowedly coming forth with warrant and authority to apprehend Jesus, and guarded against every attempt at rescue, than two swords among twelve men? Had these followers of their Lord felt that they were to depend on their own strength and nerve, they would have shrunk in dismay from the "provision" made for their own and their Master's safety. Yet Jesus says, "It is enough"—enough for the purpose I have in view—enough to shew you how defenceless in yourselves, how secure in Me from every harm.

SECTION CXIII.

(Chapter xxii. verse 39—46.)
Matt. xxvi. 36—46. Mark xiv. 32—42. John xviii. 1, 2.

It was no forbidden scene of peril or temptation into which these disciples rushed in any overweening confidence in their own strength. It was in the way of duty—in obedience to, and compliance with the Saviour's injunctions, and in, literally,

following His footsteps, that they entered the garden of Gethsemane. "Arise, let us go hence," had been His own words to them. Nor was it without full warning of their danger. They had been distinctly told by their Master that one should betray Him, and all forsake Him; and they never seem to have doubted the truth of the assertion as regarded another's guilt, though they disbelieved and denied it for themselves. Peter especially had been personally and individually told that his guilt would approach the nearest to that of the traitor in denying his Master. Nay more, as they enter the fatal precincts of the garden, Jesus once more reminds them of their danger and bids them have recourse to the surest and only safeguard in their hour of need, "Pray that ye enter not into temptation." And yet they fell—with all this tender care and caution, with all these solemn warnings and injunctions, they fell,—and into the very sin against which they had been warned. And Jesus well knew, that if the trial and temptation overtook them, if the emergency arose and found them unprepared, they would fall: and therefore it was that He bids them pray that they may not enter into temptation, that they might not approach its precincts, nor wander carelessly about its confines. It was in full accordance not only with the spirit, but with the very words He had Himself taught them in the petition, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil;" nor was it without most

apt significance that He thus recalled it, in this moment of danger, to their recollection. How then can we account for the fact that they fell—that they entered into the very temptation against which they were warned, and fell before its powerful assault, even while Jesus was nigh to succour and protect? Was it that there was one mightier than He to pluck them out of His hand—that He was Himself, in that hour of weakness, no longer "mighty to save?" Was it that prayer was of no avail—that the sight of their Saviour's agonies, as *He* prayed, and thrice repeated His prayer, had no effect on their hearts? It was nothing of the kind—it was simply that they paid no heed to their Master's warning—that they did not pray for aid and for deliverance, forgot all sense of their danger, and in full conviction of their own safety fell fast asleep. Their very slumber was deep guiltiness. "Watch and pray" had been their Lord's injunction even at an earlier period; but they had evidently forgotten both the earlier and the later warning, and though the sight of Jesus in His agony might, one would have thought, have recalled them to a sense of the fearful conflict in which He was Himself engaged, and some dread of that foe, who was thus assaulting Him, yet with strange and guilty indifference to the awful scene around, they yielded themselves to slumber. It has indeed been suggested that this unnatural slumber was the work of Satan to add to the Saviour's sufferings,

and no doubt He did feel it deeply. It must have wrung His affectionate heart acutely in the hour of sorrow, when it drew from Him that most touching remonstrance: "What! could ye not watch with Me one hour?" But be it that it was Satan's handiwork, that this deep sleep was, in some measure, his agency; it may have been, for "Satan," we know, "desired to have them," and would not of course scruple at any means within his power to compass his ends. But what then! does that lessen their sin? does that exculpate them? as well might the Lord have remitted Eve's sin, when she said, "The serpent beguiled me and I did eat." It may well be that as "Satan entered into Judas," and as he worked upon his covetousness to suggest the betrayal of his Master, and as he equally desired to have Peter and the rest, and worked upon their cowardice to suggest the denial of the one, and the desertion of the others; so he may have suggested the needlessness of prayer and the harmlessness of sleep. But I do not see a single word in the narrative to intimate that such was really the case, far less, if it were so, that it in any degree exonerated them: nor indeed did they attempt to excuse themselves by any such vain and useless plea. And I would remind you that it is a poor wretched subterfuge for a sinner, when brought to a sense of his sin, to be throwing the blame off himself on to something else, as Adam threw his guilt on Eve, and by imputation

on God Himself, "the woman *whom Thou gavest me,*" she gave me to eat—and Eve again on the serpent—so many a sinner says, "the temptation put in my way was too strong for me,"—"my passion, the passions *which God gave me,* were too powerful"—"Satan beguiled me," and so on: but remember this: genuine, sincere, heartfelt repentance, the repentance wrought by the Holy Spirit, never goes to secondary causes, never extenuates by laying blame on any one or any thing else, but goes at once to the plague-spot of its own heart, and says with the publican, "God! be merciful to *me* a sinner:" or with David, "Be merciful to *my sin,* O Lord, for it is great." "I acknowledge *my* transgression, and *my* sin is ever before me." Temptation may be strong, passion may be powerful, Satan may be mighty, and earnestly desire to have you—the spirit may be willing, and the flesh may be weak, but remember the warning which Jesus gave to His disciples, but which they neglected, "Pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

SECTION CXIV.

(Chapter xxii. verse 47—53.)
Matt. xxvi. 47—56. Mark xiv. 43—52. John xviii. 3—11.

We have here the act of the traitor Judas in betraying his Master with a kiss. A kiss has been

well described to be the overflowing of the heart at the lips. There is no doubt a kiss of tenderness and affection, and that is the brother's kiss; and there is a kiss of pity and forgiveness, and that is the Christian's kiss: but there is also the kiss of dissimulation, and that is the traitor's kiss—the kiss which on this night of sorrow Judas gave to his Master. Was it then, or could it be in his case the heart overflowing at his lips? Assuredly it was: in his heart was hypocrisy and covetousness, guile and treachery, and most fitting was it that the traitor's guilty purpose of cowardice and wrong should veil itself under the guise of reverence and affection. Alas! how true the language of the prophet, that the most cutting wounds with which the Lord was scarred were those with which He was wounded in the house, and by the hand of His friends! And is there no treachery in the present day? Are there none, who, with seeming reverence say, "Lord, Lord, and yet do not the things which He says?" I fear many and many a professing Christian reacts Judas' sin over again. Enrolled among Christ's followers, enlisted under His banner, sworn to fealty and unswerving obedience, assuming His name and calling themselves Christians, outwardly professing reverence and regard, and it may be, every day bending the knee before Him in token of homage and fidelity; and yet betraying Him, His cause, His gospel, and in secret joining with those very enemies who would

not have this man to reign over them. Their lips, like those of Judas, are with Jesus, but their heart, like his, with Satan; their words are for Jesus, but their works are for the devil. It is not *looking* like, but *living* like a Christian that will avail; and Augustine tells us that there is often a vast difference between the face of the work, and the heart of the workman. And so here there was, even with the traitor's heart, all the outward appearance of a disciple up to the very last moment. Judas was the trusted treasurer of their little store, and probably on that very evening had been employed to purchase something for the passover. At any rate, when Jesus said to him, in direct reference to his guilty purpose, "What thou doest, do quickly;" it is expressly added, that his fellow-disciples knew not for what purpose Jesus had spoken this unto him, but regarded it as simply a direction for some commission he had to execute. It is sad to think that there are those who assume and keep on a cloak of sanctity and piety as a cover for the grossest sins *almost* to the very last; for Satan generally deserts at the last, and leaves the unhappy one, whom he has deluded to his ruin, and used as long as he needed him, to all the horrors of detection, and all the agonies of remorse. It is seldom that the devil stands the hypocrite's friend to the very last, any more than he did to Judas, and, at any rate, he claims him for his own at the last, and that for ever. It was

most fatally and rapidly true with regard to Judas that the hope of the hypocrite shall perish; and will it not be so with the hypocrites now, with those who do Judas' work. Judas hanged himself, "that he might go to his own place," and our Lord expressly declares of the careless and unwatchful servant, that He will appoint him "his portion with the hypocrites where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Yet even at this moment of wrong and outrage, in the very midst of enemies thirsting for His blood and eager for His condemnation, how beautifully does the Saviour maintain His character as meek and forgiving, and His own precept, "Do good to those that hate you." Peter in his misguided and hasty zeal had drawn one of the swords in their little band, and cut off the ear of one of the servants of the high priest. How tenderly does Jesus in the midst of His own sorrow remember mercy—mercy for one who had none for Him. "Suffer ye thus far;" rebuking probably His disciples for their hasty rashness, or, it may be, bidding those who were proceeding to seize and bind Him, to stay for one moment their violence, He immediately healed the man. One voice less we may hope there would be in that crowd which was to cry, "Crucify Him, crucify Him." One hand the fewer we would believe among those that blindfolded and struck Him on the face. It was indeed the hour for vindictive cruelty, and hellish

malice to triumph: the powers of darkness in hell, and hearts as malignant as they on earth, were for the moment in the ascendency. It was the permitted and the predicted, though limited discomfiture of Him that was to put all enemies under His feet, yet ere He put all things under Him, there was to be one brief moment of superiority for Satan: "thou shalt bruise His heel." And yet, was it Satan that could prevail against the Lord's anointed, was it he that could bruise, though but the heel of the wonderful One? Oh, no! "it pleased the Lord to bruise Him," it was He that "put Him to shame, and made His soul an offering for sin;" and even in this *His* hour of weakness, and Satan's hour of triumph, how merciful to heal, how mighty to save!

SECTION CXV.

(Chapter xxii. verse 54—62.)
Matt. xxvi. 69—75. Mark xiv. 66—72. John xviii. 17—27.

THERE is something very painful in the sight of *any* man falling into sin. He is a fellow-creature, and he is perilling an everlasting soul. He is also insulting God, our God, the Master whom we obey, the Father whom we love: in the language of the apostle, he is "accounting the blood of Jesus a common thing, and doing despite to the Spirit of Grace." And we feel a blending of horror and

indignation and pity. It is this tender compassion for sinners which is so manifest in the character of David. He says in one Psalm, "I am horribly afraid for the ungodly that forsake Thy law;" in another, "Mine eyes gush out with water, because men keep not Thy law;" and in a third, "It grieveth me when I see the transgressor." And I would just say, that no one is so compassionate over, or feels so deeply for the sins of others, as he who has been convinced of his own sin, and has felt the sweetness of pardon and reconciliation with the God he has offended. It is that which gave such tenderness to David's tone and words, when he spake of sinners. But if we, and if every child of God feels so keenly, even when the ungodly are in question, when the avowedly profane and immoral violate the law of God, what must be our feeling when we see one of God's own children falling into sin, forgetting the covenant engagement of his youth, and overcome by strong temptation: when we see an Abraham distrusting God; a Moses speaking presumptuously and unadvisedly with his lips; a Job impatient under suffering and cursing the day of his birth; a David sinning with a high hand and a hardened heart; and, as here, a Peter denying the Master he loved, and who was about to seal *His* love for Peter in His own blood. I have often felt that this enumeration of the sins of God's especial people in the Bible is a very striking evidence that that Bible

is the Word of God. No human cause, no mere system of man would dare, or could bear to reveal the infirmities of those whom it delights to honour. Human biography is far more inclined to embalm than dissect the memories of those whom it records; and there can be no doubt that these recorded sins of God's own people in the Bible have given occasion to the enemy to blaspheme, and that the ungodly have loved to drag them forward as if they formed an excuse for their own sins. It is so at this very day—if a Christian professor, and especially if a Christian minister (and, alas! they are men of like passions with others,) falls into open sin, it is painful to see and feel with what exultation and malicious glee a sneering world will drag it into daylight. The world will not, with Shem and Japhet, walk backward to cover his shame, and forbear to look upon it; but will rather with scoffing Ham, point to the fallen one, as he lies in his shame, and cry, "See there, see there," and make use of his weakness as a plea for their own wickedness. The world is very merciless in its censure of Christians; it has no sympathy, no pity for their infirmity, but rather rejoices in it as if it lessened their own guilt. I do not complain of this hard measure, I rather rejoice that is so; it is one of the most powerful, human restraints which God in His mercy has given; it is one of the strongest human barriers around the Christian's conduct, not merely that he may not

cause a weaker brother to stumble, but that through his misconduct he may give no occasion to the enemy to speak reproachfully. Happy however for poor sinners that God weighs in more equal scales! Happy for poor Peter, on this night of shame, that the Lord saw there was love in Peter's heart, though there was denial on Peter's lips; and that even in the garden, when His poor weak one first fell into sin by neglecting His Lord's admonition to watch and pray, and yielding to slumber, the compassionate remark of Jesus was, that the spirit was willing, though the flesh was weak. It was the state of the Church of old, "I sleep, but mine heart waketh." "And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter." I do not know whether Jesus was within sight or hearing of Peter, when His poor follower so painfully denied Him; but He who made the ear, shall He not hear, or He who made the eye, shall not He see; and we may well say of that look, however given—what a look must that have been, which while it flashed conviction, conveyed forgiveness also — a look, which overwhelmed the sinner with the sight of his sin, but yet melted that sinner's heart into tears! What a lesson to ourselves does this fall of Peter convey! It is very probable that in the garden of Gethsemane, when Peter first saw the traitor Judas heading the bands of those that were about to lay hold on Jesus, and approaching Him with a kiss, he must have felt the deepest indig-

nation with the most affectionate love, and as he drew his sword and smote the servant of the high priest, he may have uttered in his own heart, "Thank God, I am not as this traitor is." And yet within two hours, he himself denied, with oaths and imprecations that he had ever known Jesus! Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall; and let him that scoffeth at a brother's sin, remember the sinful dust, and the sinful ashes of which his own nature is made.

SECTION CXVI.

(Chapter xxii. verse 63 to the end.)
Matt. xxvii. 1—14. Mark xv. 1—5. John xviii. 28—38.

THE sufferings of Christ have already met us in the two preceding Gospels of Matthew and Mark, and Luke is not less minute and distinct in his narrative of what befell our Lord on this night of sorrow, both, as now, in the high priest's house, and before the council of His own nation, as well as shortly after before the Roman governor and from the hands of the heathen soldiery. I would therefore confine our attention now to the solemn question asked of Jesus by the chief priests and Scribes, "Art Thou the Christ? tell us." I have called it a solemn question, for most assuredly it was one, though so blasphemously asked.

And it shews us how ungodly men may ask the most solemn questions of religious truth: questions which embrace the whole of revealed religion, and on a right understanding and cordial reception of which eternal life and salvation depend, and yet neither have nor feel the slightest interest either in the question or the answer. The enquiry may be most momentous in itself, but made in so flippant or irreverent, so captious or so sceptical a manner as to evidence at once that the enquirer has not the remotest intention to apply to his own heart the truth he may elicit. In the case of these priests and Scribes it was not so much in flippancy or indifference that they asked this question, but in the deepest subtlety and malignity, and for the express purpose of eliciting such an answer, as might serve to convict their prisoner of blasphemy. Well indeed might Jesus, who knew what was in their hearts, refuse an answer to such a deep-laid snare; and most truly might He declare, that if He told them, they would not believe. And had He asked them such a question as might have led them to the just and natural inference that He was in very deed the Christ, they would not have answered Him. He had asked them but a few hours before such a question, how David's Son was David's Lord, and they either would not or could not answer Him. And should He now assert His claim to be the Christ, should He avow Himself HIM to whom all the prophets gave wit-

ness, they would not acknowledge His claims nor let Him go. Yet the truth was too important, at such an hour, to be withheld; they had had attestation upon attestation—the angels in heaven and the devils in hell had declared Him the Holy One of God; the Spirit of God had proclaimed Him as the Son of God, and God the Father from out of heaven had uttered, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The blind had received their sight, the maimed, the crippled and the paralytic had alike owned His almighty power, leprosy had fled before His touch, and even without His touch; nay, death itself had given up its keys, and at His bidding suffered the very tenants of the grave to go free; and these priests had resisted every proof, had hardened their hearts against every conviction, and closed their eyes and ears against every testimony Yet, as in the case of the Lord's vineyard, though the husbandmen had disregarded every messenger and every message, yet one more effort was to be made, one more herald of mercy to be sent, even the Son Himself. So here, though such reiterated testimony had been given that Jesus was the Christ, and had been disbelieved, yet one more assurance of the truth was to be given, and one more rejection of that truth was to fill up the measure of their guilt. Jesus therefore refers to the well-known prophecy of Daniel in his seventh chapter: and which in its literal sense was so shortly to be accomplished, when,

amid the clouds of heaven, and encircled by His attendant angels, Jesus was to ascend from this earth after His resurrection to the Ancient of Days, to Him who was from everlasting to everlasting, and should there receive for Himself an everlasting dominion, and a kingdom which should not be destroyed. The reference was too distinct to be misunderstood, and these chief priests at once put the plain question, "Art Thou then the Son of God?" And the plain and simple answer of Jesus asserts the solemn truth, "Ye say that I am," which in Jewish idiom was well understood to be "I am." "I am the Christ," the predicted Saviour, the prefigured Victim, The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world: "I, even I, am the Lord, and beside Me there is no Saviour." "Is there a God beside Me? yea, there is no God, I know not any." Just for one moment let us consider, had the Lord given another answer to that question, had He, with the Baptist, when a similar question was proposed to him, "denied not, but confessed, 'I am not the Christ.' I am not He that should come," and you have need therefore to look for another; just reflect, on what would have been, and must have been, the result. Jesus was He in whom all prophecy was centered, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy —Jesus was He in whom all the types, all the promises were gathered into one; and had He not been He that should have redeemed Israel, and

rescued fallen man, where could Israel, where could we have looked for another? how could the curse have been removed, the sacrifice offered, the atonement made, the plague stayed? Man must have been shut up for ever under condemnation; a far deeper and more awful deluge than that which swept the primæval world, must have poured over every successive generation of Adam's race, even the deluge of God's wrath against sin, without even the rainbow of hope or promise to cheer a guilty world. It was indeed then a solemn question, which these scorners put to Jesus, "Art Thou the Christ?" and oh! for ever blessed be the love that from that bound, and mocked, and bruised prisoner drew forth the glorious truth, "Ye say that I am," and that we too can, in the very words of, but in a far different spirit from these priests, say, "What need we any further witness, for we ourselves have heard of His own mouth."

SECTION CXVII.

(Chapter xxiii. verse 1—11.)
Matt. xxvii. 1—14. Mark xv. 1—5. John xviii. 28—38.

One hardly knows which to wonder at most, the effrontery, or the falsehood, of the present charge against Jesus. In their own council they had adjudged Jesus to be guilty of blasphemy for claiming

to be the Son of God—and by the law of Moses, a blasphemer was to be stoned to death. "We have a law, and by our law He ought to die" is their own declaration to Pilate—and why? because "He made Himself the Son of God." Thus they adjudged Him guilty of death because of blasphemy. Why then did they not proceed to enforce the sentence of their own law? Because there were two prophecies that stood in the way, and the Scripture must be fulfilled: not that they regarded prophecy or heeded Scripture—they probably knew them both, but never dreamed of them as relating to Him whom, in fulfilment of these very prophecies, they were now dragging before Pilate. The one prophecy related to themselves, the other to Jesus. The aged Jacob on his dying bed had declared that the sceptre should not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet till Shiloh come: that is that Judah should exercise all the functions of independent sovereignty and judicial legislation till the coming of Christ; and among those functions of a sovereign prince, the issues of life and death are amongst the most important and unquestioned. At the period then of Christ's coming into the world this prophecy of Jacob distinctly declared that sovereignty should cease, and the judicial power of life and death should be taken from them. With Herod the Great, the very semblance and name of a monarch in Jerusalem had been abolished, and by their own

confession and acknowledgment the prediction was now accomplished—"it is not lawful for us to put any man to death." They had no longer the power to execute the sentence of their own law and their own courts of justice without the consent and sanction of the Roman governor. The sceptre therefore had departed from Judah, and the law-giver from between his feet, and therefore also Shiloh, or Jesus, had already come. The other prophecy signified by what death Jesus should die. The brazen serpent lifted up on the pole in the sight of all Israel in the wilderness was the type of Jesus lifted up on the cross, and Jesus Himself had expressly declared that He should be crucified, and that by Gentile hands. Had these priests then had the power to enforce the penalty of death for blasphemy, Jesus would have been stoned, and the prophecy unfulfilled. We now see why these priests and scribes, this sanhedrim or council of the Jewish nation thus hurried their poor prisoner before the Roman governor. Without him Jesus could not be put to death. But why did they not adhere to the charge for which they had already condemned Jesus? why introduce a new one which they must have known and felt to be so utterly untenable? Because Pilate in all probability would have driven them from his tribunal: he might have said, as Gallio another Roman deputy or governor did say not long afterwards "If it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it,

for I will be no judge of such matters." Humanly speaking, this was probably the restraining motive, but the real one, no doubt, was, because for blasphemy he would have been stoned, and though the priests cared little what death He should die if He were but put to death, yet Jesus had distinctly declared that He should be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles and be stoned. Therefore it was that they invented this wicked falsehood and charge of disaffection and disloyalty to Cæsar—a charge the more malignant in its falsehood, because they had but the day before sought to ensnare Jesus into such an avowal, and He had evaded their malice and distinctly replied "Render unto Cæsar the things that be Cæsar's." The charge was too palpably unjust, and Pilate at once declared His acquittal and His innocence: "I find no fault in Him." How carefully, one might almost say how scrupulously, does the Lord guard the spotless Jesus from the slightest charge of sin or guilt, or even fault—not merely unstained, but without the imputation of stain. How does He draw forth acknowledgment after acknowledgment from every lip of the innocence of Him whom they yet condemned as guilty. The traitor who betrayed Him, the judge who condemned Him, Herod who mocked Him, the malefactor who suffered with Him, the Roman officer who guarded Him, all alike testified that He was without sin, the Lamb without blemish. Nay, God Himself sent a vision from heaven, a

dream in the deep slumbers of the night to Pilate's wife, so that she could not rest in her bed because of Him, but sent an urgent entreaty and remonstrance to her husband to "have nothing to do with that just man." Yes! it was necessary that though He should die, it should be "the just for the unjust," that it should be true of Him and Him alone that "He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth." Thank God then for His unspeakable gift; and thank Jesus for that unutterable love, which led Him to endure such contradiction of sinners; from the Jewish council who delivered Him to Pilate, from Pilate who sent Him to Herod, and from Herod and his men of war who set Him at nought and sent Him back to Pilate, and made up their quarrel over the blood of Jesus.

SECTION CXVIII.

(Chapter xxiii. verse 13—25.)
Matt. xxvii. 15—26. Mark xv. 6—15. John xviii. 39, 40. John xix. 1—16.

In this speech which Pilate addresses to the chief priests and rulers and the people announcing his own conviction of the entire innocence of Jesus, and Herod's concurrence of opinion with him and his consequent determination to release Him, there is a great semblance of justice and humanity.

But unfortunately for Pilate's acquittal he announces a purpose so utterly irreconcilable with justice or humanity, that one hardly knows to what to impute it. He pronounces from his seat of justice, in the presence of the assembled court, the innocence of the prisoner brought before him of every crime laid to His charge, and he declares that Herod also, so far better acquainted with their law than he could possibly be, had yet discovered nothing that could justify the detention, far less the punishment of Jesus. And yet, with strange inconsistency, he adds, "I will *therefore* chastise Him, and release Him." He acquits Him of guilt, and of every charge, and yet condemns Him to the cruel punishment and torture of scourging; and that too, be it remembered, not with the merciful restriction of the Mosaic law, which limited the punishment to forty stripes, but to be dealt out at the caprice, and will, and extension of a Roman soldier. It is difficult, as I have said, to impute such a perversion of justice and righteous dealing to any fitting cause. I think however that we may gather from the scanty notices of Pilate's character left on record, both by the evangelists and heathen historians, that he was a man of weak and vacillating character, of no firmness of principle, and if not of such cruelty of temper as his savage master, Tiberius, yet having in no degree any sense of the value of human life, or the guilt of shedding man's blood.

His feelings were evidently touched and enlisted in behalf of Jesus. His meek and uncomplaining demeanour, blended with a dignity and calmness that overawed even, unconsciously, His judge, and the answer He had given to Pilate's questions, so full of mysterious yet undoubted claims to be beyond the reach of Pilate's power, unless it had been permitted of God, had all combined to invest Jesus with an awe he could not shake off. The impression too, as we learn from a preceding evangelist, had been deepened by that message from his wife, to which I alluded yesterday, urging him to have nothing to do with the condemnation of Jesus, as she had suffered many things in a dream because of Him. One can therefore hardly doubt that Pilate was most sincerely desirous to release Jesus from the vindictive malice of the Jews. Why then did he not do so? he had the power: he himself said to Jesus, "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee?" But Pilate had that fear of man before his eyes, of which the Word of God declares that it bringeth a snare. And a most fearful snare it brought to Pilate. It was this fear which made him truckle to the base vindictiveness of the priests in ordering Jesus, contrary to all law, to be scourged, in hopes that that concession would abate their malice, and lead them to acquiesce in His release. It was this fear which led him onwards in guilt, and, when he

found that the scourging of the innocent had only whetted their rage, to give sentence that it should be as they required. And we may add, that it was this fear of man which eventually led to his own sad and melancholy end; and it is a singular and striking coincidence, that both Judas and Pilate committed suicide.

I do not know that I could leave on your minds a more salutary conviction of the danger of a vacillating wavering character, that has not strength to resist the evil solicitations of others, but weakly yields to importunity and urging, what it knows to be wrong, but has not courage to refuse. It has been often said that there is not a harder word in the English language to pronounce than that little monosyllable "no." I do not say that a weak and wavering purpose of mind, or even a fear of man will lead you to the same deep guilt as that of Pilate. You may not sit in high places of power or authority as he did, but in every station of life, in the humblest as well as the highest, it is incumbent on you to resist with uncompromising firmness the first encroachment of evil, the first incentives to do wrong, whether from the solicitations of others, their importunities, their sneers, or their outcries, for all will be employed in their turn. The first concession is in fact a virtual surrender of all; had Pilate acted on his first conviction, his soul had been free from this guilt; but he tampered with duty, he argued with temptation, he gave way a

little, and Satan soon threw down the poor fences which conscience still retained, and the enemy came in like a flood. And he, who to secure Cæsar's friendship, gave up all considerations of honour, humanity, and conscience, was shortly after, by that Cæsar's successor, driven from his government into exile; and, as I have said, ended his days a hopeless and miserable suicide.

SECTION CXIX.

(Chapter xxiii. verse 26—31.)
Matt. xxvii. 31—56. Mark xv. 20—41. John xix. 16—37.

It would have been impossible for any with the commonest feelings of compassion to have but looked on the suffering Jesus, as He toiled up the heights of Calvary to His crucifixion, without pity. His brow bleeding from the crown of thorns, still unremoved—His back "ploughed with long furrows" from the cruel scourging He had endured—surrounded by enemies, reviling Him even to the very cross; and though that cross was borne by another, inasmuch as His exhausted frame had no longer strength to sustain its weight, one does not wonder to find that a great company of people, and of women followed, bewailing and lamenting Him. Who these women were, we know not; they evidently belonged not to that little band of faithful

women who followed Him from Galilee and ministered unto Him of their substance, and whom we afterwards find so early at His tomb. These were daughters of Jerusalem, and were probably only interested in the sufferings and fate of the Saviour from that tenderness natural to their sex. They wept as they saw His bowed and bleeding form—they wept as they thought of the death of torture to which He was being dragged; and, it may be, they had heard, and seen, and recalled to mind the many acts of love and miracles of mercy which had marked His last visit to Jerusalem, and their tender hearts were overwhelmed with sorrow, and their eyes ran down with tears as they followed the uncomplaining sufferer. But did ever a tear fall from human eye in real unfeigned sorrow that was unnoticed by God? Nay, so precious are some tears in His sight that He is said to put them into His bottle, to store them up in holy keeping and remembrance before Him, as pearls of peculiar beauty, gems of the purest water. And thus, even in this hour of unexampled suffering, He hears their wailing, He sees their tears; and, forgetting His own sorrows and His own pain in the sight of their grief, He turns to these "daughters of Jerusalem," and bids them weep no more for Him, but for themselves and their children. I do not know a passage of Scripture which so expressly intimates the unutterable tenderness that was in the human heart of Jesus,

when, as God, He carried His prophetic glance beyond that present period of time, and saw Jerusalem compassed with armies, and trodden down of the Gentiles. He thought not of the cross, which Simon bore by His side and to which He was so soon to be nailed; He gave not a moment's consideration to the agonies of His own dying hour; He heard not any longer the revilings of those that mocked and jeered; His ear caught only the sobs and sighings of these weeping women, and He thought alone on the calamities that were coming on Jerusalem, and the unparalleled sufferings of its protracted siege; and He bids them weep for themselves and their children. As He turned and looked upon that crowd of tender-hearted women, He might well think of His own awful word of prophecy, and see many there who would remind Him of "the tender and delicate woman, whose eye, in the straightness of the siege, should be evil toward her young one from between her feet, and toward her children which she should bear, eating them for want of all things in the siege and straightness wherewith the enemy should distress them in all their gates." As He gazed upon inanimate Jerusalem, He had wept even over her stones that should be thrown down; and now as He gazes on her "daughters" bemoaning His sufferings, He bids them weep for those days of horror which were coming on themselves and their children. Woe indeed unto those that

give suck in those days; and woe too to the "sucking children of those mother's bosoms!" I can well believe that many a one in the present day, as they read the narrative of the Saviour's sufferings, or hear them described and commented upon with the touching eloquence of the preacher, may be moved to tears. I can readily picture to myself during that solemn period of passion-week —of commemorating the death of Jesus, many a tender heart may be moved even to the deepest sorrow; but even now, even in this room, if there be a sorrowing heart, if there be one touched with pity while thinking on the suffering Jesus, He still turns with unabated love and undiminished mercy, and says, "Weep not for Me, nor for the sufferings I endured; but weep for the sins that nailed Me to My cross. Weep for the sins that still crucify Me afresh, and for the wounds wherewith I am daily wounded even in the house of My friends."

SECTION CXX.

(Chapter xxiii. verse 32—38.)
Matt. xxvii. 31—56 Mark xv. 20—41. John xix. 16—37.

On reading this passage of Scripture we may well exclaim, "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past

finding out!" If there ever were an exhibition of the utter weakness and powerlessness of a human being, to all outward appearance it was that of Jesus at the moment of which we read. Stretched upon the cross as a malefactor, nailed to the accursed tree, bleeding at every pore, and life slowly but surely ebbing away, His enemies standing around to witness His dying agonies, and with fiendish malice exulting over every pang and uttering the most bitter taunts and revilings, and with no hope of release but in death, one may truly say of Jesus at that moment, that He was, in the eyes of all those that were gazing on Him, whether in sorrow or in exultation, as utterly powerless to save Himself or others, as these rulers and Roman soldiers declared Him to be. And yet at that very moment of supposed inability to save, He was exercising, even on and from that cross of shame on which He hung, two of the most mighty attributes for which He assumed our nature. He was the Intercessor, and the Saviour —the Intercessor, not for them alone that nailed Him to the cross, but for all—the Saviour, not of him only that hung by His side, but of all that come unto God by Him. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" Jesus uttered seven sad and melancholy cries upon the cross, and this heads the list. Oh! what a fitting introduction and testimony to that love for sinners, the chief of sinners, which could thus utter a prayer

for His murderers. And yet, no doubt, through the wondrous grace of God given unto them, many of Jesus' followers have attained to a similar measure of love and forgiveness of wrong, even of the deepest wrong: and many have departed from the world in torture and in martyrdom with prayer on their lips and love in their hearts for those that had tortured them. It was so with the dying Stephen. In *his* last moments, he besought the Lord for those that were stoning him, and his lips closed in death, as they uttered the last earthly desire of his heart, a prayer for his murderers; "Lord! lay not this sin to their charge;" and that prayer of the martyred Stephen was as effectually heard and answered in heaven, as that of his dying Master on the cross. And many of earth's annals, many a martyr's dungeon, and scaffold, and stake, can testify of the same mind in some poor earthen vessel, that was in the Lord Jesus. "You take from me" said a Christian martyr to his persecutors, "a life that I cannot keep, and bestow upon me a life that I cannot lose; which is as if you should take from me counters, and furnish me with gold."

No doubt the prayer of Jesus, as He hung upon the cross, was effectual for those that were then before Him, as well as for all who should come after: but why was it effectual, what was it that gave such irresistible and especial efficacy to that prayer of the holy Jesus. It was not the words:

for gracious, and loving, and compassionate as they were, they had in themselves no worth to call down pardon on the guilty: it was not the love that was in the heart of Jesus, for even that love, of itself, was powerless to save. The intercession of the Son of God was then, and ever will be, effectual, because He hung upon that cross, because there His blood was poured out and His soul made an offering for sin, because there God's justice was satisfied, the ransom paid, the substitute provided, the atonement made. It was because He had made peace through the blood of the cross by Him to reconcile all things to Himself; and that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. And how effectual that prayer has been! how powerful it was for many of those who had been so eager for His death, but who at length were pricked in their hearts, and convinced of their sin. And is it not as effectual now as it was then? has it lost any of its efficacy, because He who utters it is now at the right hand of God, and no longer on the cross; because He can now claim as His purchase, what He once solicited of His Father's mercy? I do not, I dare not, say that the intercession of Jesus is more powerful now than it was even on the cross; but there is now, not only the intercession of Jesus *for* us—"He ever liveth to make intercession"—but the intercession also of the Spirit *with* and *within* us: and as the apostle triumphantly asked, "If God be for

us, who can be against us?" What a plea too is that on behalf of sinners, "Father! forgive them, for they know not what they do." It was true of Judas; did he dream where his sin would end? it was true of Pilate; did he know whither his sin was leading him? does a sinner at the present day know and believe that the wages of sin are death, and that the soul that sinneth it shall die? No! Satan still blinds the eyes of sinners now, as he blinded the eyes of sinners then; "A deceived heart still turns them aside, that they cannot deliver their souls, nor say, 'Is there not a lie in my right hand?'"

SECTION CXXI.

(Chapter xxiii. verse 39—43.)
Matt. xxvii. 31—56. Mark xv. 20—41. John xix. 16—37.

I SAID yesterday that in the hour of His greatest weakness Jesus exercised the two mightiest attributes for which He assumed our nature. We have considered His intercessory prayer for His murderers, "Father! forgive them, for they know not what they do." We come now to this most sovereign act of God's electing grace, in snatching this brand out of the burning, at the very moment when it was so nearly consumed. We are so apt to look on Jesus on the cross as the Man of

sorrows—and so He was—no sorrow was like unto His sorrow wherewith the Lord in His fierce anger afflicted Him. But even there—in His abandonment, in His dying agonies, He was still as much "The Wonderful, The Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father," as He was when an infant of days, and all the hosts of heaven shouted His praise. On that cross of shame He exercised a sovereignty, which neither Herod, nor Pilate, nor Pilate's master with the world's power at his beck could have exercised: He conferred distinctions, and gave a promise, which it could not have entered into the mind of any earthly potentate to conceive. Even amid the supernatural darkness which was now shrouding the firmament, a work of glory, a work of grace, a work of sovereign power and triumph was going on, which transcended all the earthly triumphs of any human conqueror. And yet to mortal eye there was no sign nor sound of conquest; the very prayer of the poor penitent was probably unheard by man, and the answer of Jesus alike unknown to the bystanders. They hung there upon their crosses, undistinguished one from the other, save that the brow of one was encircled by a crown of thorns, and that His cross bore a triple inscription of His supposed offence; and yet at that very moment when Jesus Himself seemed given over as a prey unto the spoiler, He was plucking from Satan's hands a soul, whom he had claimed and

reckoned as His own for ever. "Who can forgive sins but God alone!" had the Jews themselves said in questioning our Lord's miracles on earth; and here are sins forgiven! here is a place in paradise promised and secured to one who was doomed to die, and that "justly," for his sins.

Does this however encourage a death-bed repentance, does it hold out a promise to such, or testify to its efficacy and its safety? Nothing of the kind. It does not indeed forbid it, but it is so utterly out of the pale of all usual conversions, so immeasurably beyond the usual measure of God's dealings of mercy, that any one, who in reliance on this narrative should delay repentance to a dying hour, would be as inconsistent as the man who should become a blasphemer and a persecutor that he might be converted like Saul. All was of God's free grace: God as Sovereign, Jesus as Lord over all, demands back from Satan the soul he had apparently secured as his own; sends, as it were, a message from the cross to the very gates of hell, and says, "Deliver him from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom;" and thus in the very hour, and the very scene of Satan's supposed triumph, a stronger than he is seen suspended on a cross, and takes from him all the armour wherein he trusted.

I do not look upon this conversion of the penitent thief as a death-bed repentance, though occurring in a dying hour. I look upon it as alto-

gether in the same class with that miracle of mercy which met Saul on the road to Damascus; and if Paul in after days could say that he "obtained mercy, that in him first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe in Him to life everlasting," so no doubt the malefactor and the persecutor now alike unite their joyous strains in heaven and say, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto Thy name be the praise and the glory ascribed."

But what a glimpse of the unseen world is here vouchsafed! "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." That day was now fast waning to its close; and as regarded Him who promised and him to whom that promise was given, even before its close their spirits would have departed to that home Jesus had prepared and promised. Their lifeless bodies would indeed hang for a space upon the cross, and friends would weep and foes exult; but Jesus had already admitted that redeemed and rescued one to the joy and security of that abode, where sorrow, and sighing, and pain and suffering should be no more, and God Himself wipes away all tears from weeping eyes. "To day shalt thou be with Me"—and is it so?—that as the spirit quits its earthly tenement, while weeping relatives and sorrowing friends are standing round, watching and waiting for the last breath that shall dismiss the soul; and, it may be, even while uncon-

scious that it has departed, that it has breathed its last on earth, that spirit is with Jesus? I cannot doubt it—I would not—I would not for ten thousand world's duration be robbed of such a hope for my own soul, or for those near and dear to me, who shall depart hence in the Lord. "Lord Jesus! receive my spirit," was the dying martyr's last prayer. "To day shalt thou be with Me," is that Lord's answer, not to him alone that hung upon the cross with Him, nor to the dying Stephen only, but as another martyred one in the near approach of his death said, "and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing."

SECTION CXXII.

(Chapter xxiii. verse 44—49.)
Matt. xxvii. 31—56. Mark xv. 20—41. John xix. 16—37.

It was a striking evidence to the divine mission of Jesus which was afforded on the banks of Jordan, when the Holy Spirit rested on Jesus, and a voice from out of heaven proclaimed Him God's beloved Son. But that attestation was evidently not a public one, nor meant for an announcement to the people; and seems to have been more intended for the confirmation of John's faith, and his guidance as to the person of Jesus. That

too was a striking manifestation of the Godhead residing bodily in Jesus, when, on the Mount of Transfiguration, His face did shine as the sun and His raiment was white and glistening, so as no fuller on earth could whiten it, and two of heaven's inmates were sent to converse with Him; but that too was confined to three disciples only. And so again, at the close of His ministry, when, in a moment of trouble and anguish, He called on His Father to glorify His name, it was a striking attestation which that Father gave in answer to His call by a voice from out of heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again;" but even then the sound was indistinct and inaudible by all, for while some said that an angel spake to Him, others deemed it only the muttering of the distant thunder. But in this His hour of death—in this His hour of mortal weakness and human agony, when to all outward appearance the powers of darkness had conquered, and His earthly enemies had successfully wreaked their malice on His unresisting head, how unparalleled the attestation, how accumulative the evidence on every side that no common spirit was departing from its earthly tenement, that no finite issue was at stake. The sun was indeed eclipsed, but by no physical or natural obscuration of its light—the darkness that for the space of three hours overspread not the height of Calvary alone, nor the guilty city of Jerusalem and its shattered temple,

but the whole land of Judæa, and it may be even remoter districts, was like the three days' darkness in the land of Egypt, a miraculous and heaven-sent darkness, only that then the children of Israel had light in all their dwellings, and now they were the guilty and the smitten ones, and could not but acknowledge that it came from Him, who said of Himself, "I form the light, and I create darkness." All nature was convulsed, and the very rocks, and the very graves testified that some mighty agent was at work, some wondrous transaction taking place. And yet in the midst of all that elemental war, when some men's hearts were failing them for fear, and some for sorrow, how calm and resigned the voice of Jesus! With what a placid, peaceful, voluntary act, He commends His departing spirit into His Father's hands! It was but just before that He had uttered that saddest and most heart-rending of all cries, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Yet now, however dark the elements around Him, the light of God's countenance had once more shone upon His agonized brow, and poured its comforts into His sorrowing heart. He had, in that previous agony made His soul indeed an offering for sin—the offended and righteous judge was exacting from the substitute the very last farthing of man's mighty debt—and it was now accepted, it was now complete, and Jesus once more resigns Himself to a loving Father's hands and heart. The baptism,

for which He had been once so straitened, was now accomplished, and He might well rejoice over the work He had wrought, and the victory He had won. Yet how different the feelings with which many of those bystanders were gazing on the scene before them! The centurion, though himself a heathen, seems to have been more than deeply interested. One can hardly interpre this words as nothing more than an expression of his conviction of the innocence of Jesus; he evidently gives utterance to the heart-felt confession of his faith, that that lifeless One before him was the righteous, the just one, the holy one of God. And one can scarcely help looking on this centurion as another jewel in the Saviour's crown, another trophy of the cross. Nor do I indeed think that he was by any means the only one; many of those who had gone to Calvary with far other feelings, and had perhaps joined in the revilings beneath the cross, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned in sorrow, and it may be remorse, and were perhaps among that number of three thousand converts who a few weeks afterwards, when Peter recalled the scenes of this guilty day, were pricked in their hearts and said, "Men and brethren! what shall we do?" But what shall we say of those friends and women who had followed Him from Galilee, and who are here described as "standing afar off?" Could it be lack of love in their fond and faithful hearts? or timid cowardice

that kept them thus afar? Assuredly not. I do not know how far Roman discipline might have hindered their near approach—we know that one, the dearest and the nearest was close to His cross to receive His parting legacy of love, we know that the disciple whom He loved was within hearing of his Master's voice—and if two, why not the rest? All had been done that sympathy or love could do or was permitted to do; and they appear to have at length withdrawn to a distance from the painful scene, it may be, to indulge their own deep sorrow and anguish, afar from the notice of the scoffing priests, or the rude soldiery; and yet to have remained within sight of their dying Lord. The others "smote their breasts and returned;" the women lingered, unwilling to quit even the lifeless corpse till they had seen it secure from insult in the guarded tomb. When one thinks of all that passed upon and beneath this cross of triumph, one is indeed ready with the Apostle to cry out "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

SECTION CXXIII.

(Chapter xxiii. verse 50 to the end.)
Matt. xxvii. 57—61. Mark xv. 42—47. John xix. 38—42.

THIS Joseph of Arimathea was evidently one of

God's hidden ones; and though there is much of infirmity mingled with his character, (and alas! who is without sin among us?) yet every trait recorded of him by the various evangelists testifies to the excellence and worth of his character. Like the aged Simeon and Anna, he too was one of those, who "himself waited for the kingdom of God:" they indeed recognized and confessed the Saviour in the babe of eight days old; Joseph, though he too recognized and believed in the Saviour, heard His doctrine, saw His miracles, and well knew the blameless tenor of His life, yet did not confess Him for fear of the Jews, and herein was the infirmity of his character manifested. Yet, for all this, he was one of God's hidden ones, and the Lord was reserving him and building him up for the moment when he would be needed. He was the rich man predicted of the prophet 750 years before, in whose sepulchre the crucified Jesus was to make His grave. He was not needed as an avowed disciple and follower of the Lord; and the Lord therefore for a time left him to his own unaided weakness, that we might learn, through his weakness, to know where our strength lies. And yet we find the present timid one gradually preparing for the work, though unconscious to himself, for which God had designed him. As a member of the Sanhedrim or council of the Jews, which had condemned Jesus for blasphemy, he had the courage to resist their wicked purposes, and by

his vote had disavowed their deed. And now at the moment of need he forgets all his fears, throws aside every scruple, and boldly avows himself a disciple of Jesus, of the very being who was hanging as a malefactor on the cross; and, as it would appear, unaccompanied by a single adherent, or, if accompanied by any, by one only, and that one who had been as timid as himself, craves of the Roman governor permission to take down the torn and bleeding body of his Lord to lay it in his own new tomb, wherein never man before was laid. That tomb had never known decay, no corpse of man had there seen corruption; and when the body of Jesus was laid there, it was still to be without corruption—"His soul was not left in hell, neither did His flesh see corruption."

There was indeed another purpose in God's mind to be answered by Jesus, thus occupying an hitherto untenanted tomb, for no other body could arise from it, but the only One that had been placed there. There is something very striking, nay, comforting in the reflection that the Lord is always prepared against the moment of emergency and need. We know not the solitary nooks, or distant corners, the retired glens, or lowly homes where His hidden ones are being trained up; they are themselves unconscious of their future mission, and even in spots where human sagacity, and human shrewdness would least look for human aid, thence does the Lord's human instrument most frequently

emerge. Few, when they heard the miner's boy singing in the streets of Eisenach for his daily bread, would have recognized in him the future Reformer of Christendom, before whom Popes and Potentates quailed; and the youth himself must have been unconscious for many a lengthened year of that germ of Gospel truth and love which God had even then sown in his heart, and was tending with such watchful care. And as Luther in Germany, and Zwingle in Switzerland, and our own Reformers in England, so no doubt at this moment God's hidden ones are teeming everywhere. If the Lord were to open our eyes, as He did those of the prophet's servant, we too should see, as he did, the mountain of the Lord's house encircled with chariots and horses of fire; where we, in our fear, thought there were only enemies and oppressors. But you must not think that the Lord's hidden ones are only among those for whom great work is assigned; it is said of all God's people that "their life is hid with Christ in God;" and long before Paul said this, David had uttered very nearly the same truth, that "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him." God has a work for each—for you and for me; and not much unlike this work, in which Joseph was here engaged: "that we being dead unto sin, and living unto righteousness, and being buried with Christ in His death, may crucify the old man, and utterly abolish the whole body of sin." He has given us

every means to train us for this work, and if we are not up to the work, or the work is left undone, or done imperfectly, it will not be because God is wanting to us, but we are wanting to ourselves. There is something very touching in the affection with which these women of Galilee waited on the yet warm remains of their departed Master, followed them to the very sepulchre, marked the place where He was laid, and then returning to their temporary homes in Jerusalem, or its vicinity, prepared spices and ointment to embalm His body, when the Sabbath had expired. And yet, as with Joseph, how much of infirmity is visible! how much of love! how little of faith! One of that faithful band of women had already embalmed His body for the burying; what need of more? Alas! they still disquieted themselves with the thought of that corruption, which He was never to see; and their hopes and their wishes, as well as fears, were all bounded by that narrowed rock in which the tomb of Jesus was hewn. That approaching Sabbath, though so high a day, was to them a day of mourning and of widowhood; yet no doubt with them, in the midst of their grief, there was light in the darkness, and their crucified Lord, even in His grave, was more to them than the high priest in his robes, or Herod on his throne.

SECTION CXXIV.

(Chapter xxiv. verse 1—12.)

Matt. xxviii. 1—8. Mark xvi. 1—8. John. xx. 1—10.

We left these affectionate mourners preparing spices and ointments to embalm the body of their beloved Lord. Yet eager and impatient as they were for their pious office they abstained even from this work of love on the Sabbath-day. It is particularly recorded of them at the conclusion of the last chapter that "they rested on the Sabbath-day according to the commandment," as if God's Holy Spirit meant that we should especially dwell on this evidence of their pious and devout observance of the Sabbath. Surely, if ever there was a work of love, which might justify a deviation from the strict observance of the Sabbath, we might have said that to anoint the Saviour's body for His burial was one. If to restore a withered arm, to give sight to the blind, to deal bread to the hungry or even to pull a perishing ox from a pit, were appropriate and permitted works on the Sabbath, surely, to scatter the spices and ointments they had prepared over the body of Him they loved, in memorial of their undying remembrance, might have been deemed no violation of the Sabbath. And yet He who performed and justified these acts of mercy to the living, has, by His Holy Spirit, left on record this resting of these pious women

on the Sabbath-day according to the commandment in token of His approval of their act. But no sooner had the morning dawned, no sooner was there the least glimmering of day—nay, "while it was yet dark," or as the language of St. Luke graphically intimates, "while the rising sun was deep sunk beneath the horizon," these women hastened to their pious task with the costly spices and ointments they had prepared. They came to pay honour to a crucified Master but they found a risen Jesus! And how often is this the case with God's children, that He surprises them as it were with the abundance of His mercies, and at the first they can hardly realize the bounty, or give credence to its reality. With David, perhaps, they may pray that "they may not want," and with him too their testimony often is, that "their cup runneth over." It was so here, they came anticipating difficulty of access to the tomb, but the difficulty they dreaded had vanished, and the very removal of the hindrance had been the accomplishment of what they most desired, yet so little believed. If, as the Apostle Peter afterwards said, "It was not possible that Jesus could be holden of death," if that mighty conqueror was to surrender his own keys, and open a free exit to one mightier than He—if the all-devouring grave could not for one instant beyond the appointed time retain the imprisoned Lord, surely, it was not possible that He could be holden even of the mighty stone, or

the priest's seal, or the Roman band of soldiers. At the predicted hour, at the very moment, that prophecy was accomplished to its letter, and no further end could be answered by the detention of Jesus in the tomb: by His own almighty power He resumed life and quitted for ever the precincts of the grave. Death had no more dominion over Him. But what a word of consolation issues from this tenantless grave of the Redeemer! "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" They might be perhaps partly words of rebuke, but still so full of comfort, so full of hope and promise, that we may well say it was indeed a message sent from heaven, and uttered by heavenly lips. I do not say that angels are now sent from heaven to those who are mourning over some loved one just enclosed in the grave, though we know that they are ever encamped about our path; but of this I am sure, that the same question may well rebuke our lingering clinging sorrow over the dear ones we may have laid in the tomb, and who have died in the Lord.

"Blessed are those dead," saith the Spirit. And why—not only that they rest from their labours, but have entered into their rest, into that eternal rest which Jesus hath prepared for His. Why seek we the living ones amid the tenants of the grave? We have no need now to go with Mary to the grave to weep there—there is but the mouldering dust, the spirit has winged its flight far

away to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and is now a member of that assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven. Jesus, on this morning of His resurrection, became the first fruits of them that sleep in death; and, as He said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live," so He afterwards said to His beloved disciple, "Fear not, I am the first and the last; I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen, and have the keys of hell and death." "I am He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth."

SECTION CXXV.

(Chapter xxiv. verse 13, 24.)
Matt. xxviii. 9—10. Mark xvi. 9—14. John xx. 11—20

WHAT a comment does this incident afford us on that promise of Jesus, that "where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." Here were two disciples only, sorrowful in heart as well as sad in countenance, but still solacing the weary steps of their Sabbath-day's journey by conversing about the Saviour they loved, and for whom they were mourning as for one dead, and for ever lost to them.

They had thus met together in His name; of Him they talked and of the sad events of the preceding days, how every hope of the redemption of Israel through Jesus had been apparently buried in the grave with Him.

And yet how mysterious, how astounding the intelligence that had this very morning reached their ears: that the women, who had gone to the grave on their holy errand, had found it empty, and had seen a vision of angels, which told them He was risen from the dead. Was it even so? Could it be that the Master they so loved had burst the bands of death, and, on this the third day, have arisen again? Could the women have been deceived—could they have brought false intelligence—had their fears magnified in the dim and indistinct twilight of the morning, some natural appearance into a vision of angels? But then, the voice; the very words, "Why seek ye the living among the dead?"—how could that be accounted for? What sound of the air, what moaning of the wind could ever syllable accents like these? One at least of these two disciples who were thus journeying to Emmäus, Cleopas, must have had undoubted confidence in the faithful report of these women, for one of them was his own wife, and the mother of three, at least, of the twelve apostles of Jesus: on her veracity therefore he must have fully relied, and besides, the fact of the emptiness of the grave had been confirmed by some of the

very apostles, who had hastened to the tomb, and found it even as the women had said—and with still more confirmatory proofs, that no mere plunderers, no human hands had rifled that grave, for the very grave clothes were left behind and folded up, as if to intimate, not merely that the transaction in that grave had been no hurried act of men fearful of detection, but that the very garments, spotted by the flesh, could not cling to the risen Saviour. And yet again, as far as they knew, Jesus had not been seen by any; and if He were indeed alive, if He had arisen from the dead, why had He not vouchsafed this proof, this testimony to any of His faithful followers? The case was indeed one full of perplexity and mystery, and well might they be, and well might they look, sad, as they talked about all these things which had happened. We may easily believe that these, or some such as these, were the communications that passed between these two disciples on their way. Their hearts were full of Jesus, and little else could have found any interest in those hearts: and though no doubt the events of the preceding days had given a sad and melancholy prominence to the subject, I cannot but look upon this journey to Emmäus as a sweet illustration of that passage of the prophet: "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another," and how immeasurably beyond the assurance that the Lord would hear and hearken, and "a book of remembrance be writ-

ten for them that feared the Lord and thought on His name;" for here Jesus Himself joins them, Jesus walks with them by the way, enters into their sorrows, notices the very sadness of their countenances, and affectionately enquires its cause as one ready and willing to sympathize. It was indeed at first as a stranger that Jesus joined them, and their own senses were so far held under divine restraint that they neither knew His features nor recognized His voice, but He was still with them, still by their side. And I believe that if we more frequently made Jesus the theme of our conversation, talking of Him by the way as well as in our houses, Jesus would more frequently join Himself to us. There are so many intimations in the Bible of the profitable results of making religious subjects the topic of more common and frequent conversation than we are unhappily in the habit of doing, that I think the Lord meant us to gather from them the especial blessing that would attend such a practice. Nor do I think, amid the many advancements of civilization and Christian courtesy and amenity, that we have changed for the better in discarding so much as we do religious conversation from our more social meetings, as well as our greetings by the way. What a sweet and simple spirit, and what a pious exchange of mutual good-will and wishes was that in ancient times, which marked the intercourse between the master and the servant, as when Boaz entered his

barley-field to look at his reapers, and his salutation to them was, "The Lord be with you," while they answered, "The Lord bless thee;" and David represents even the passers-by of such a scene as saying, "The Lord prosper you, we wish you good luck in the name of the Lord." And, alas! I have often thought our harvest fields testify to no such remembrance of the Lord. The truth is, the hearts of Cleopas and his companion were full of Jesus, and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh: and *our* mouths speak not, because our hearts are empty.

SECTION CXXVI.

(Chapter xxiv. verse 25—27.)
Matt. xxviii. 9—10. Mark xvi. 9—14. John xx. 11—20.

It must have been an intensely interesting moment when the risen Jesus thus condescended to enlighten these two poor timid disciples as to the nature and necessity of those sufferings He had undergone, and which had so caused their faith to stagger. I believe that even at this present day, there are many to whom the sufferings of Christ are a stumbling-block, who cannot understand why Jesus should suffer, and who seem to think these sufferings not only an imputation on His Father's love, but as derogatory to the Saviour

Himself. It was so even in the earliest days; St. Paul declares that the preaching of Christ crucified was to the Greeks foolishness, and to the Jews a stumbling-block. And, alas! we know that many who have professed themselves Christian missionaries, and have gone forth among the heathen and idolaters to preach the Gospel, have held back the cross of Christ, as if it were a reproach and a hindrance; and even those good and holy men, the Moravian missionaries, in their earliest efforts to convert the Greenlanders, thought to win them by philosophic arguments to prove the existence of a God, and the attributes that must belong to so high and holy a Being. But their preaching was in vain; nor was it till they in reality preached Christ and Him crucified—Christ the sinner's hope—Christ dying the just for the unjust to bring us to God—it was not till they had pointed to Jesus as the Redeemer of the world hanging upon the cross, and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," it was not till then, that in accordance with His own prophetic promise they drew these poor unenlightened Greenlanders to Jesus. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." "And this," emphatically adds the apostle, "This He said signifying by what death He should die." And so here; it is the Saviour Himself arguing on His own sufferings: it is Jesus Himself reasoning with His doubting

timid followers on His own death, His death of shame, and all the ignominy and torture that attended it; and His language is most significant and expressive. He does not, in tenderness, bid them not to be cast down and desponding at what had happened to Him, for God had raised Him again, and the glory of His resurrection would blot out the shame of the cross: He does not pass over the sufferings He had undergone, as if they were a reproach to His name, and might be a hindrance to His claims, and lead them to dwell only on the glories of His future kingdom. Far from this—He reproaches them for their foolishness, for their slowness of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken, and asks, as if the question admitted of no doubt, and could receive but one answer, Ought not *the* Christ to have suffered these things? If I am *the* Christ predicted by the prophets,—if I am *the* Messiah to whom patriarchs, and prophets, and types and ceremonies give witness—if I am the lamb slain from the foundation of the world—ought I not to have suffered these things? But He leaves them not even with this unanswerable demand. He would not leave a doubt unsatisfied, a scruple unremoved; and with most touching condescension, taking His own Holy Word, and beginning at the very beginning, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. One is tempted to ex-

claim, what many no doubt have uttered, "Oh! that this discourse were but left on record; oh! that the Holy Spirit had but indited this sermon for our edification, and that amid the "all things He should call to their remembrance of whatsoever Jesus had said to His disciples," these precious treasures gathered from the Scripture mine had been stored up for our use and enjoyment! And yet we may truly say, "What need of it!" We have the very pages from which Jesus extracted it—we have the very identical Scriptures from which He drew His proofs; Moses and the prophets are in our hands, and it is our Lord's own injunction, "Search the Scriptures, for they are they which testify of Me." And, blessed be God! that darkness, which enveloped the actual cross of Jesus, and was so typical of the darkness that should shroud the understanding and make the hearts of so many of His disciples sad, has long since passed away. We know that Jesus as our substitute, the sin-offering for us, must have suffered these things, or God's justice must have remained unsatisfied, man's debt unpaid, and his redemption incomplete; we know that in no other way than by laying on Him the iniquities of us all, the burden of our guilt could have been taken away from our souls: and thrice blessed be God, we know that Christ not only ought, but *has* suffered all these things; He has "poured out His soul unto death; He has been

numbered with the transgressors; He has borne the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

SECTION CXXVII.

(Chapter xxiv. verse 28—35.)
Matt. xxviii. 9, 10. Mark xvi. 9—14. John xx. 11—20.

It is of little moment to enquire in what way Jesus withheld the eyes of these two disciples from recognizing the features of the Master they so intimately knew and so entirely loved, or in what way the momentary recognition was vouchsafed, and again instantly withdrawn. I would much rather refer to that touching description which these disciples give of the effect of Jesus' words on their hearts and feelings, as He opened to them the Scriptures, and reasoned with them on the necessity of those sufferings and that death, through which He had just passed. "Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?" The expression is a very strong one, as if the writer had himself felt the impression, and the very sensations he so accurately describes. The language is that of one, who, we might suppose, had been himself present, and who, with affectionate memory, in recording in after years the transaction, loves to use the very words in which himself and his companion had given utterance to

their feelings at the moment. "Did not our hearts burn within us?" It is no new conjecture that Luke himself was the companion of Cleopas in this memorable walk to Emmäus, and I must acknowledge that this passage seems to me strongly confirmatory of the supposition. But be this as it may, let us ask ourselves the question what impression the words of Jesus make on our hearts. It is true they are not uttered by the Lord Himself in person, but they are as mighty to convince, as powerful to persuade, and as touching to affect, as when the messengers of the Pharisees declared of Him that "never man spake like this man." And yet how often did Jesus speak without effect—how often did His words fall on hearts, not burning with love and zeal, but cold, and callous, and unimpressed; nay, how often did they produce offence! even some of His own disciples said, "This is an hard saying, who can bear it," and walked no more with Him. And it is the same at this day, many hear and do not hearken, many catch the words, but retain no impression; the words vibrate on the ear, but produce no thrill in the heart, they strike no chord there. And what is the reason, what produces the difference between this class and kind of hearers, and those who were walking to Emmäus on the day of Jesus' resurrection? It was that their hearts were full of love, and that that love had been shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit; and as their hearts

were filled with love to Jesus, so His name was on their lips, as well as in their hearts. They were talking of a crucified Saviour, and longing to know a risen one. Had their hearts been occupied with worldly things, had they been conversing, as they walked, about the trifles of time, the news of the day, or their merchandize, or their farm, Jesus had never joined Himself to them, nor had their hearts burned within them at His gracious words. And what a striking testimony does this powerful preaching of Jesus supply to the value of the Holy Scriptures! We cannot indeed say, as His apostle afterwards said, "He preached not Himself," for His whole theme was Himself, it was Christ, and Him crucified. Yet whence did He bring His argnments, where did He go for proofs? He went at once to the Word of God—He sought truth in the word of truth—He went not to tradition, nor human gloss and comment, to Scribe or Pharisee, or Rabbi; but "beginning at Moses and the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." What a lesson to ourselves, where to go for a reason of the hope that is in us; what a rebuke to those who would place the love of God's Word, and the trust in God's Word on the same pedestal with idolatry, and profanely call it Bibliolatry. It is to me one of the most consolatory and triumphant assurances of the value and worth of God's Word, as well as its origin, that the blessed Jesus, before He

began His ministry, sought in the store-house of that holy volume for weapons wherewith to "quench the fiery darts of the wicked one;" and now again at the close of that ministry turns to the same inspired pages to build up the faith of His poor timid doubting followers, condescends as it were, for their instruction to open page by page of the sacred volume, and almost with His last earthly teaching stamps authenticity and truth on every passage of Holy Writ relating to Himself.

SECTION CXXVIII.

(Chapter xxiv. verse 36—49.)
Matt. xxviii. 9, 10. Mark xvi. 9—14. John xx. 11—20.

THE last time that Jesus had been with His assembled disciples was on the night of His apprehension. They had partaken with Him of the last passover, and had afterwards sat with Him around the sacramental table. And it was after that, that they had all forsaken Him and fled. He had indeed, since His resurrection, appeared unto Mary Magdalene, and others of the faithful and affectionate women who had accompanied Him from Galilee; He had shewn Himself to Peter alone, and to the two disciples on their road to Emmäus—but this was the first time He had presented Himself to the assembled body of His

apostles. There must have been a variety of feelings among them: some perhaps, as Peter, had been guilty of more aggravated guilt than others, and one can perhaps but hardly doubt that as they looked around on their little band and saw its number diminished, though but by one, and that one withdrawn by his own guilty hand of suicide, there must have been some very saddening thoughts as to their brother's fall, and how they had been kept by grace alone, and the Lord's upholding hand and prayer from similar destruction. There is not a more painful feeling than to miss one who has been associated with us in holy fellowship and love, gone out from among us and walking no more with us; but still more agonizing the feeling in the falling-away of one whom we have loved, with whom we have taken sweet counsel, and talked of the things of Jesus—like Judas, "fallen by transgression," and alas! like him too, "gone to his own place." There must have been many a sad, yet many a grateful feeling in the hearts of those assembled on this evening of the resurrection. In one respect indeed we may say of them, "There is no difference, for all had sinned," all had forsaken Jesus and fled! What a salutation then of forgiveness and reconciliation was contained in those two* simple but expressive words which their Master addressed to them on His first appearance, "Peace be unto you." Not a word of reproach,

* Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν.

not an expression of surprise at their conduct, not even an allusion to their unkindness and desertion; but the salutation of affection, of tenderness and peace. We might well have believed that even with this salutation sounding in their ears, and the more so perhaps because of it, that their first thoughts would have recurred to their own conduct, and then been merged in overwhelming joy at the undoubted sight of their risen and restored Lord. And yet it was not so; it was not dismay at the consciousness of their sin; it was not sorrow at their unkind desertion; it was not joy to behold Jesus again and to hear His words of love once more; but how singular the acknowledgment, how strange the account, if it were not true, that "they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. Nor was it till Jesus had convinced them, by indisputable proofs and signs, that it was even He, that they slowly admitted the conviction—and then, how true to nature the declaration, that for very joy they believed not,—that their very gladness rendered them still incredulous.

There is something very touching in the circumstance of Jesus shewing to them His hands and His feet in confirmation of His identity—those pierced hands and perforated feet, the evidences of His love for them, as for sinners of all mankind. There is something too most affecting in the feeling that Jesus chose to arise from the grave with these

wounds and scars still subsisting in His frame. The same power by which He arose from the dead could at once have obliterated every trace of the cross; but the risen Jesus loves to retain them, and now points to them as at once evidences of His reality and His love. It will not be so with them that are His on the morning of their resurrection —the grave will send forth no maimed, nor scarred, nor wounded ones. Every trace of earth, and of earth's sufferings will be done away. "It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body." And is there not something still more touching than all in the knowledge that with these scars on His hands and His feet, these wounds wherewith He was wounded in the house of His friends, He has ascended up into heaven, and still bears them, and will continue to bear them as evidences of a love, and pledges of an intercession that can never fail. Among those who must have gazed that evening with intensest feeling on those wounded hands and feet was the beloved disciple, and to him was vouchsafed long afterwards a glorious vision of his ascended and triumphant Lord, when a door was opened in heaven, and he heard a voice talking with him, and saying, "Come up hither and I will shew thee things that must be." And what was the sight that met his raptured gaze? "He beheld,

and lo! in the midst of the throne stood *a Lamb as it had been slain.*" And those around the throne "sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof, for Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood."

SECTION CXXIX.

(Chapter xxiv. verse 50 to the end.)
Matt. xxviii. 16—20. Mark xvi. 15—20.

It was not without significance that the ascension of our blessed Lord took place where it did —at Bethany. Bethany was close to, and may be almost said, to form a part of, or at least to be in the district of, the Mount of Olives. Adjoining to Bethany was the garden of Gethsemane, in which Jesus had undergone His agony; and close to it also was the Mount of Calvary on which He had suffered. It was therefore most fitting that the same scene which saw His shame and sufferings should witness His triumph and glory, that where He was most abased, there He should be most exalted. It is truly and touchingly said in our Prayer-book in the Visitation for the Sick, as a comfort to Christians under their adversities, troubles and sickness, that Jesus Himself went not up to joy before He suffered, that He entered not into His glory before He was crucified." And from

this height at Bethany the varied scenes of both must have been full in view, to remind us that "our way to eternal joy is to suffer here with Christ, and our door to enter into eternal life is gladly to die with Christ." It was this union of the two of which St. Peter wrote when he spoke of the Spirit of Christ, "testifying beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow:" and of which St. Paul also writes, when he bids us "look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Nor let the longing, waiting, watching child of God forget that on this Mount of Olives His feet shall once more stand in that day, when the Lord our God shall come and all His saints with Him: and as in the day of His humiliation the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, so in the day of His triumph this Mount Olivet shall be cleaved in the midst.

St. Luke is here very brief in the narrative of the ascension, though he gives us a somewhat more detailed account in the Acts of the Apostles. He passes over the other interviews which took place between Jesus and His disciples, and hastens on to this triumphant close of the Saviour's sojourn on earth. Yet with what simplicity is it narrated, with what utter absence of all description, even of the cloud on which He ascended, and of the angelic

beings who announced His future coming in like manner in the clouds of heaven. All is studiously avoided by the evangelist; the only circumstance he notes is, that ere He finally quitted them, before He was taken from them that they should see His face no more on earth, He lifted up His hands and blessed them; and in this priestly act, He was parted from them; nay, before He had finished the blessing, "while He blessed them," while the words were yet upon His lips, He was parted from them. The last sounds that met their ears were those of tenderness and encouragement; the last earthly accents of the Master they loved were those of love and blessing. But was that blessing therefore left unfinished—was its purpose incomplete? It is often so with the parting blessing of one we love on earth; the lips may refuse their office, the faint and feeble voice be lost amid the last struggles of death, and the last words which a dying friend or relative may pant to breathe, are often unuttered, or at least unheard. And sad and sorrowing is such a scene both to the dying and the living —to the one departing and to those that stay behind; and we seem to feel as if we were robbed of that last legacy of love, which affection would strive to utter; or, that some dying injunction must be left unfulfilled because it was cut short in death. But it was not so here—as He ascended, He blessed them, and while He was ascending, He continued to bless them; and when He had ascended, and

had for ever sat down on the right hand of God. He still continued to bless and to intercede for them. "He ever liveth to make intercession for His people." The prayer that He had breathed for them on earth, He still bore upon His heart, and that prayer is for ever heard and answered in heaven. We know the very words of that prayer; He has Himself left it on record of the undying love He bears to His brethren! "I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which Thou hast given Me."

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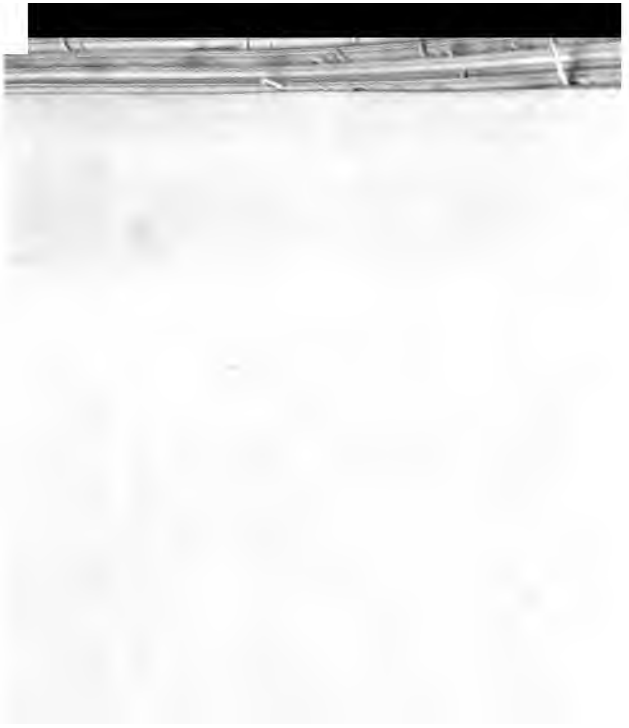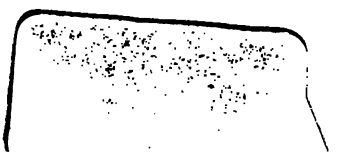
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